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Small steps, little hope

Both Arab and US officials expect very little from the "small steps" Madeleine Albright was able to take during her first Middle East visit

Madeleine Albright came back from her first trip to the Middle East, convinced that the situation in the region was worse than she had expected.

"I think the situation in terms of the crisis of confidence is probably even worse than I thought," the US secretary of state said during a stopover in Shannon. "I think that it's fairly tattered."

Administration insiders told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Albright was taken aback by the refusal of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to honour Israel's commitments under the Oslo Accords. He argued that his government would collapse if he ordered a halt to the construction of settlements or agreed to a second troop redeployment in the West Bank.

Consequently, Albright was left with limited options. The first is to continue pressing Yasser Arafat to crack down on the infrastructure of Hamas and Jihad in the self-rule territories. The second is to address the other issues by taking what she called "small steps, when large steps are needed."

"At least, the parties will be talking again," she said, referring to one of the few concrete results that emerged from her tour — a new round of discussions next Tuesday in Washington between Israelis and Palestinians, with Dennis Ross officiating. There will be a follow-up meeting in New York the following week. Albright, who will be there for the UN General Assembly session, invited Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and Abu Mazen, Arafat's right-hand man, for talks.

Administration officials told the *Weekly* that "expectations are extremely low" for both sets of talks. "Unfortunately, there is no agreement yet about the basis for such negotiations."

Neither did the Palestinians appear to set much hope on the planned meetings, viewing them, rather, as a test of the intentions of both Netanyahu and the US administration.

Saeb Ereikat, minister of local administration, said that "it is too early to tell where matters will be heading but right now they are taking a serious turn." He said any revival of the peace negotiations should be based on "working out solutions to the obstacles which forced the peace process to come to a halt."

This meant that the Palestinians will stick to their demands: a halt to Israeli settlement construction, implementing the interim steps of the Oslo Accords while opening parallel negotiations on final status arrangements.

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, an Arafat adviser, said: "I fear the Washington and New York meetings will be a waste of time. Albright was here and nothing happened."

He added: "The Americans are making political moves, with no concrete results. Albright made an important tour and made important statements and publicly took very important positions. But there are no concrete results." Abu Rudeineh attributed this to the Americans' failure to put pressure on Netanyahu.

"The situation is grave, explosive and more serious than many people think," he said. "It may escalate to a confrontation or even a war, due to the absence of a real American effort and Israeli intransigence."

Arafat will take the Palestinians' case to a conference of Arab foreign ministers opening in Cairo on Saturday and to a number of European countries which he plans to visit afterwards.

According to Nabil Shaath, minister of planning and international cooperation, Arafat was informed by the European Union's envoy Miguel Moratinos that the EU planned to clamp limited economic sanctions against Israel if it continued to violate the European-Israeli and European-Palestinian partnership agreements by blockading Palestinian exports to Europe. The EU asked the Israeli government to respond to Palestinian complaints in this connection before the end of this month, Shaath said.

The Palestinians were angered by Albright's declaration that "Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were the main enemy of the average Palestinian."

"Albright's imbalance is stark, blunt and scandalous," said Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbou.

According to Marwan Kanafani, Arafat's media adviser, the Palestinian Authority's chairman told Albright he could not put people behind bars just because Netanyahu feels like it. Arafat asked Albright if she would guarantee that the US Congress would not place the PA on the list of states violating human rights should he heed her demand to crack down on Hamas and Jihad, Kanafani said.

"The role played by Albright was very limited and I think that the only outcome of her visit is that she exercised more pressure on the Palestinians to push ahead with security coordination with the Israelis," said PA Minister Abdel-Jawad Saleh. "I look at the future of the peace process and all I see is much darkness."

According to sources in Cairo, Albright made it clear to Egyptian officials that she could not convince Netanyahu to soften his policies. This, the sources said, meant that any progress in the peace process is unlikely until some domestic change takes place in Israel, such as a Likud-Labour coalition coming to power.

The sources believe that Arafat has already gone a long way in containing the Islamist militants and that there is a limit to the number of people he can round up without undermining his image as a leader of his people.

Ahmed Maher, the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, said: "We have to wait and see what comes out of the meetings scheduled to take place in Washington and New York, whether there will be real movement from the Israeli side or not."

***Hoda Tewfik** in Washington, **Tarek Hassan** in Gaza, **Khalid Amayreh** in Jerusalem, **Dina Ezzat** in Cairo*



Palestinians in Bethlehem's Deheishah camp stage a mock funeral for the Oslo Accords, on their fourth anniversary, 13 September (photo: Reuters)

Hebronising Jerusalem

No sooner had Madeleine Albright departed the region, than Jewish settlers moved on yet another Palestinian neighbourhood. **Graham Usher** writes from Jerusalem

For the Palestinian leadership, one of the very few highlights of Madeleine Albright's recent trip to the region was her suggestion that Israel should "desist" from taking unilateral actions which Palestinians "perceive" as provocative. Forty-eight hours after she left Jerusalem another "unilateral action" occurred which, in its political provocation, may spark consequences akin to those that followed the opening of the Western Wall tunnel in Jerusalem a year ago.

At around 10pm on Sunday night, 15 Jewish settlers, protected (said eyewitnesses) by "dozens" of supporters from the "Our Jerusalem" settler movement, took over a two-storey house in Ras Al-Amud, a Palestinian village that lies on the outskirts of the Old City in occupied East Jerusalem.

The settlers claim the two Palestinian families who had been living in the building had already vacated the premises. Palestinians, however, said at least one Palestinian family was turned out by the settlers. Whatever the facts, Palestinians from Ras Al-Amud converged on the scene, clashing with Israeli border police and trashing parked cars with Israeli number plates.

Within hours of the take-over, several hundred Border Police had thrown a cordon around the house and commandeered the site of a private Palestinian bus company that lies adjacent to it. Checkpoints were also set up on one of the two main roads leading to the village. "We are living in Hebron," said Nahla Hamdan, a resident of Ras Al-Amud whose tile factory sits behind the house.

Hebron is the right analogy, both in terms of the settlers dubious claim on the land and in terms of what is likely to happen should they be allowed to stay put.

The settlers claim they are renting the house in Ras Al-Amud from its "legal" owner, Irving Muskowitz, an American Jewish magnate who over the last decade has acquired Palestinian properties in several East Jerusalem villages and the Old City (as well as providing funds to finance the Western Wall tunnel). Muskowitz says he bought 3.5 acres of land in Ras Al-Amud several years ago from a Jewish religious foundation and intends to build a new "Jewish neighbourhood" of at least 75 houses on the site. Palestinians from Ras Al-Amud who have claims on the land say the sale to Muskowitz was fraudulent and has yet to be decided by an Israeli court.

What is not in dispute is that Ras Al-Amud is an exclusively Palestinian community of 11,000 inhabitants which in recent memory has never had a Jewish presence other than in the ancient Jewish cemetery that rests opposite the village on the Mount of Olives. It is this Palestinian reality that Muskowitz wants to change. "As a Jew, I desire to see the Mount of Olives not only as a place for the dead but also for the living," he told Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper on Tuesday.

Binyamin Netanyahu's response to the take-over was to feign ignorance and denounce it. Claiming no foreknowledge of the settler's action, on Monday Netanyahu said "what is happening in Ras Al-Amud is not good for Jerusalem and not good for the state of Israel." Rather, decisions to do with Jerusalem should be in accordance with a "government masterplan" and not by "private initiative". It was a line echoed by Foreign Minister David Levy and Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who described the settlers' takeover as a "catalyst for further violence in the capital."

But there are growing doubts over just how "private" was the action. According to a report by Nahum Barnea in the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* on Tuesday, Netanyahu knew of the settlers' intentions last week but asked them to defer the takeover until Albright was out of the country. A *Haaretz* editorial on the same day says the settlers' entry into Ras Al-Amud appeared to be "coordinated" with the Border Police, a claim reinforced by Palestinian eyewitnesses who insist that the police came with the settlers and not (as the police allege) "after them".

The suspicion is that Netanyahu was thus in on the act, a view bolstered by comments by him since the takeover that it may be difficult to evict the settlers "within the law."

Following "consultations" with senior colleagues aimed at reaching a solution that would satisfy the two wings of his coalition, Netanyahu offered the settlers "a compromise solution", whereby they would vacate the two Palestinian homes in Ras Al-Amud and be replaced by 10 Jewish seminary students who would renovate the buildings. Netanyahu would also recognise the settlers' "right" to settle in the Palestinian neighbourhood. The settlers, joined by Moskowitz, rejected the offer and lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court to prevent police from evicting them.

Apart from the initial clashes, Palestinians reaction has been muted, preferring to let the Israeli Peace Now Movement take the lead in protests in the village. The hope is that international and domestic Israeli pressure will prevail on Netanyahu and his coalition to remove the settlers. But the auguries are not encouraging.

"Experience tells us that whenever Jews settle in the heart of an Arab neighbourhood, there will be an explosion," said PLO Executive Committee member with special responsibility for Jerusalem, Faisal Husseini, on Tuesday. Experience also tells Palestinians that once settlers are into a place, it is mighty difficult to get them out — for testimony, the residents of Ras Al-Amud need only look south to Hebron.

Reaching out for Russia

Egypt will seek to cement economic ties with Russia during President Mubarak's visit to Moscow next week. **Nevine Khalil** reviews the president's agenda

President Hosni Mubarak will arrive in Russia on Monday for a three-day visit — his first since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Promoting economic cooperation will be at the centre of Mubarak's agenda, but political issues such as Middle East peace-making and increasing the number of permanent members of the UN security council will also be discussed.

Russia, which began co-sponsoring the peace process with the US in 1991, only one year before the demise of the USSR, has been preoccupied of late with its own domestic problems. Grappling with an about-turn in economic and political policy after nearly 75 years of communist rule, Russia turned inwards to put its house in order while trying to re-assert itself as a major power.

Although the Arabs involved in the peace process would have liked to see Russia balance out the US bias towards Israel, Middle East peace-making was no longer a real priority for Moscow, which had to address more pressing issues such as reforming the economy, controlling mushrooming organised crime and keeping the separatists at bay.

Egypt is acting now to enhance bilateral relations with Russia, focusing on greater cooperation between the private sectors of both countries. The delegation accompanying Mubarak includes 24 businessmen, many of whom are already involved in the Russian market. Russia is also seen as an economic window to other former Soviet Union states, or members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

"Economic cooperation with Russia will be through the private sector," Mubarak said yesterday, "the public sector will not take part in creating new companies." In a two-hour preparatory meeting with a large number of ministers, Mubarak said that the "utmost efforts should be exerted to open new markets and increase trade." He noted that Egyptian products must be of "top quality" in order to be able to compete in the new markets of the CIS.

During Mubarak's state visit, six agreements will be signed on the promotion and protection of investments, the avoidance of double taxation, security cooperation, which includes extradition of criminals and combating organised crime, as well as cooperation in scientific research.

Egypt is greatly interested in Russian technical know-how, especially in the field of the peaceful uses of nuclear power. Also, a protocol governing cooperation in higher education will be renewed for three more years.

Other documents expected to be finalised by the time Mubarak arrives in Moscow, include a maritime agreement and another between the ministries of justice in both countries. Egypt's Export Development Bank will also try to reach a memorandum of understanding regarding insurance on exports and imports.

The private sector is expected to create a joint venture company for the promotion of industrial exports, and another for agricultural goods, as well as a transport company, which will provide sea, river and road transport for exchanged goods at reasonable prices. The company will be formed in conjunction with the Ukraine, which controls the ports en route from Egypt to Russia and other CIS markets.

Mubarak's visit, according to Rafiq Salaheddin, adviser to the minister of international cooperation, should give "a very powerful push" to bilateral economic relations. "We are going into a new phase because both countries now have a market economy," Salaheddin told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Economic cooperation should basically be carried out by the private sector."

Salaheddin, who took part in meetings of a preparatory committee ahead of Mubarak's arrival, said that the Egyptian government is acting to "make it easier for the private sector in both Egypt and Russia to interact vigorously and in a manner that would eventually lead to extensive cooperation". He said that the "basic objective" of the committee was to support the business community. "We are simply there to help the private sector," Salaheddin said of the committee which includes nearly 20 businessmen, most of whom have dealings with Russia.

He emphasised that the investment protection and taxation agreements "would encourage and help business people to carry out their activities in a comfortable atmosphere". The main problems that still hinder Egyptian investments in Russia are transport and bank transactions. These two obstacles will be redressed through the proposed Egyptian-Russian-Ukrainian transport company and the possible creation of a joint venture bank. The Egyptian Nile Bank would like to launch a joint venture or a representative office in Russia, to cut the costs required by international banks.

"Russia is a big and central market, and we think that if we establish a good healthy relationship by exchanging goods, this could also serve to foster relations with other neighbouring CIS states," Salaheddin said. Exports to Russia include agricultural products and imports are basically raw materials and machinery.

According to statistics provided by the International Trade Point of Egypt, trade between Egypt and Russia stands almost 10 times in favour of Russia, with more than $400 million-worth of exports to Egypt. In 1992, trade between the two countries was worth just over $57 million, of which Egyptian exports amounted to about $36 million. However, four years after the break up of the Soviet Union the trade balance shifted dramatically in favour of Russia. In 1996, Egypt only exported about $37.6 million-worth of goods to Russia, while importing products worth $370.4 million.

A government source involved in Egyptian-Russian economic relations said that although the current balance of trade between the two countries is heavily in Russia's favour, Egypt is intent on establishing joint ventures to promote its exports to Russia.

Saharan poll

MOROCCAN officials and Western Saharan representatives have agreed to hold a referendum on whether Western Sahara should be independent or part of Morocco.

Former US Secretary of State James Baker, currently acting as a special UN mediator, said on Tuesday that the referendum could be held within the next 10 or 11 months if the necessary preparations begin immediately, AP reported.

Following three days of talks at the Baker Institute for Public Policy in Houston, Texas, representatives of Morocco, the Polisario Front, Algeria and Mauritania agreed on a code of conduct for the referendum, on the method of identifying eligible voters, and on the role of the UN during the transitional phase. Baker said that some issues remain unresolved, but he declined to give further details until he submits his report to UN Secretary General Kofi Annan next week.

Mine ban

DELEGATES from over a hundred nations yesterday adopted by acclamation a draft treaty calling for an immediate and total ban on anti-personnel mines. The delegates will meet again today in Oslo, Norway, to hold a formal vote, Reuters reported.

The treaty is due to be signed in Ottawa, Canada, in December. The United States, however, could not approve the draft treaty. US delegation head Eric Newsom expressed reservations about the wording of the treaty and voiced frustration that his request for an extra 24 hours of discussions was turned down.

Washington has now to either join a treaty it is opposed to or risk international reproach for not doing so.

On Tuesday, the US lobbied unsuccessfully for several opt-outs that would have allowed it to continue using landmines in the Korean Peninsula for nine more years and would have exempted its "smart" anti-personnel mines from the ban. The US also wanted countries to be able to withdraw from the treaty if they fall victim to aggression.

The move to ban land mines has proceeded with unusual speed after the death of Britain's Princess Diana, who had campaigned for such a ban.

Road horror

TWENTY-NINE children aged between 12 and 17 were killed in a horrific accident Tuesday after a truck driving them to work on cotton fields ran off the road and overturned in a canal near the town of Basyoun in Kafr El-Sheikh province, 120 kilometres north of Cairo.

According to the police, 54 children and teenagers were also injured. Except for two who suffered brain injuries, all the injured children have been released from nearby hospitals.

INSIDE

Allaying Egyptian concerns

Cairo, satisfied by Ankara's assurances regarding military cooperation with Israel, appears ready to undertake a mediation effort between Turkey and Syria. **Nevine Khalil** reports from Alexandria



Reassuring talks: Mubarak with Demirel in Alexandria last week

For nearly two hours on Tuesday, President Hosni Mubarak and Turkish President Suleyman Demirel discussed outstanding issues which have overshadowed Arab-Turkish relations for over a year. The talks, which took place at the Ras El-Tin Palace in Alexandria, dealt with a scheduled Turkish-Israeli military exercise, tension in Syrian-Turkish relations, Middle East peace-making as well as bilateral ties.

The exercises, involving Turkey, Israel and the US, set for November in the eastern Mediterranean, are officially described as rehearsals for joint search and rescue operations, but have been viewed with great suspicion in the Arab world. Cairo criticised the exercises, especially since they come at a time when Arab states are furious at the policies of Israel's right-wing government under the leadership of Binyamin Netanyahu.

Mubarak and Demirel have extensively discussed the Turkish-Israeli military cooperation agreement since it was signed last year, and this week Cairo said it was satisfied with Ankara's assurances. "I got a very good explanation from the president," Mubarak told a joint news conference. "[The exercise] is going to be limited to search and rescue. I think it could pass easily." Mubarak expressed the hope, however, that advanced combat exercises between Turkey and Israel would not take place until a comprehensive peace is established in the region.

Demirel defended military cooperation with Israel, saying that it was only a "blueprint agreement," which is similar to ones signed between Turkey and 28 other countries. "It has nothing to do with the peace process," he said. Turkey's regional neighbours, especially Syria and Iran are opposed to the accord, viewing it as a threat to the balance of force in the region. Demirel insisted, however that Turkey's ties with Israel "are not against a "third country". "No one should even have a suspicion," he added. Demirel, in an interview with *Al-Ahram* published on the day of his visit, said that Arab countries were welcome to join the exercise, even if only as observers.

Mubarak, with Demirel at his side, objected. "We have no intention of [taking part] in the exercise with the Israelis for the time being, until the problem in the Middle East comes to an end," he said. Mubarak continued that Egypt has "no objection" to closer ties between Turkey, "a friendly country," and Israel with which "we have relations". He asserted that Turkey supports the rights of the Palestinians and at the same time has "very good" relations with Israel which, Mubarak said, can be made use of in future "mediation between the Israelis and Palestinians".

"Arab countries are the brothers of Turkey," Demirel told reporters. "We don't have any problems with the Arabs that need to be settled by using force. This misunderstanding must be eliminated."

Tensions between Damascus and Ankara continue to rise, however; Turkey is accusing Syria of sponsoring Kurdish separatist rebels in its southeastern border region, while Damascus believes that Ankara is trying to block its water supply from the Euphrates River.

In the *Al-Ahram* interview, Demirel reiterated his accusations against Syria, but added that he would be "very pleased" if Mubarak made a mediation effort between Damascus and Ankara. Mubarak told the news conference that he would take up the matter with Syria's President Hafez Al-Assad when they meet today [Thursday] in Alexandria for talks. "I will tell him [Assad] what I heard from President Demirel," Mubarak said.

Later in the day, Mubarak said that he had "a very strong feeling" Assad would be forthcoming in solving the outstanding problems with Turkey. In statements made after Demirel's departure, the Egyptian president said that Assad "wants to improve relations with Turkey and I am sure of his desire to negotiate over the problems". Mubarak added that he would also convey Turkey's clarifications regarding the military exercises to other Arab leaders. "I trust in what [Demirel] told me," Mubarak said. "I respect [his] word."

A senior adviser to Demirel said before the visit that "Turkey does not have a policy of forging pacts in the Middle East. We believe peace can come to the region only by cooperation among countries," he said.

Another issue on the table was Turkey's regular incursions into the north of neighbouring Iraq in hot pursuit of Kurdish rebels. Cairo supports Iraq's territorial integrity, and feels that Ankara's military activities beyond its southeastern border are unjustified.

In the *Al-Ahram* interview, Demirel said that Turkish troops enter Iraq's northern territories for limited "cleansing" operations, because Baghdad cannot control the border region.

"The vacuum which was created in northern Iraq after the Gulf war caused a serious threat to both Turkey and Iraq," Demirel said, "therefore Turkey had no other choice but to take appropriate action to uproot terrorism in that region."

He added, however, that Ankara remains committed to upholding Iraq's sovereignty over its territories. Cairo has opposed a Turkish proposal for creating a buffer or security zone in both Turkish and Iraqi territories, saying that such a zone cannot be created unilaterally without consultations with the neighbouring state.

Differences aside

For the time being the Egyptian and US administrations are choosing to put their differences on the back-burner. **Dina Ezzat** reports

Egyptian-US relations seemed to be doing well during American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visit to Cairo last week. "The main focus of discussion between Albright and senior Egyptian officials was the current situation of the Middle East peace process, but they also touched upon some issues of bilateral concern," said one Egyptian source.

While some US-Egyptian differences were raised, such as the Cairo-Tehran relations and the cold peace between Egypt and Israel, both sides seemed willing to steer clear away from areas of contention.

With news resurfacing of serious Iranian efforts to approach Egypt for economic and military cooperation in order to counter-balance what seems to be an inevitable Turkish-Israeli alliance, the visiting US delegation expressed concern over a potential Egyptian-Iranian rapprochement at this stage. The issue is considered particularly important to the US in view of the recent warnings addressed by President Hosni Mubarak to Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu about the impact the stagnation in the peace process could have on the regional balance of power.

"I think the Americans made it clear that they would not welcome [Egypt] siding with Iran at the time being," said one source. He added, "To be honest, what Egypt would get out of restoring its relations with Iran at this stage would not amount to what it could lose by straining its ties with Washington."

Egypt has substantial economic ties with the US. Cairo is one of only three countries, with Russia and South Africa, that is firmly linked with the US in a long-term economic partnership in the framework of the Mubarak-Gore initiative which fosters cooperation in the fields of economy, technology and education. Egypt is also second only to Israel as one of the largest receiver of US economic and military assistance which together amount to $2.1 billion a year. Today, there are about 2,000 US companies in Egypt, 200 of which have permanent offices in Cairo.

Within the framework of economic discussions, Albright again stressed Washington's position that all countries in the region need to participate in the Fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference that is scheduled to be held in Doha in November. According to one source, it was tentatively established that Egypt would send a low-ranking official delegation there to avoid suggesting that other Arab states boycott the forum "but the Egyptian side insisted that it would only upgrade its delegation and encourage influential businessmen to go if the peace process moved ahead."

It was clear, nevertheless, that in their discussion of the current impasse in the peace process, there were areas "where the two parties did not see eye-to-eye". Indeed, while the Egyptian side feels that it is time for the US to exercise serious pressure on the Israeli prime minister, the US tends to ask Egypt to urge the Palestinians to exert more efforts on the security front. Nonetheless, Albright made it clear to Egyptian officials that she has been and will be trying to get Netanyahu to slow down on the building of settlements. "The only promise she made is that she will try," revealed an Egyptian source.

The Egyptian side warned again that Netanyahu's policies are driving the entire region to the brink of an abyss and that if they are left unchecked, militant Islamist activities in many countries in the region could escalate.

As one Egyptian source confirmed, the discussions were "lengthy, detailed and frank but with generally limited dwelling on the long list of differences", such as Egypt's concern over US congressional claims that Copts are persecuted in Egypt and over the US role in southern Sudan. Also kept low on the agenda were discussions of the US concerns over Cairo's warm relations with Libya, which Washington sees as a potential threat to stability in the region. Another area of disagreement is Washington's continued veto over the future re-integration of Iraq into the international community.

The political and economic ties between Cairo and Washington are generally described by both capitals as "close", "friendly" and "strategic".

As one senior US official stated in a telephone interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "the US respects and values Egypt's central role in the region and its support for the peace process, and it is committed to continue working with Egypt for the future, not just for the sake of the region but also for the sake of a stable and prosperous Egypt."

On the eve of Albright's arrival to the region last week, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa described the bilateral relations between the two countries "as very important from the Egyptian perspective". And in statements following Albright's departure, Moussa further affirmed Cairo's positive assessment of bilateral relations: "Egyptian-US relations, as such, are good and developing on several fronts."

Moussa pointed out, however, that the pro-Israel lobby in US was doing its utmost to try and sour relations between Cairo and Washington. But diplomatic sources told the *Weekly* that in recent weeks Egypt has been expressing its dissatisfaction with the US contribution to the peace process. Senior Egyptian officials tried to get that message across to Washington through common allies in order to avoid straining bilateral relations.

Militants sentenced

The Supreme Military Court sentenced four Islamist militants to death and eight others to life imprisonment on Monday at the conclusion of one of the most publicised trials since the outbreak of violence in late 1992. **Khaled Dawoud** attended

Only a handful of journalists were allowed inside the Haikstep military camp Monday morning to witness the conclusion of the two-month trial of 98 members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. Dozens of army soldiers, plain clothes policemen and officers from different security branches were on the alert at the camp's entrance, facing hundreds of relatives, mostly heavily-veiled women and children, who stood there from the early morning waiting for permission to attend the sentencing session.

Permission was denied, and the relatives waited for hours in vain. For security reasons, they were only informed of the sentences through lawyers and journalists after the defendants were taken back to prison under heavy police protection.

According to police, the Gama'a members sentenced on Monday were among the most dangerous elements of the group. They were held responsible for the worst wave of violence that hit Egypt in 1994, including the bombing of nine banks and the assassination of top security officers. Among their victims was Maj. Gen. Raouf Khairat, a top State Security officer in charge of combating Islamist violence.

The number of defendants who stood trial was the largest ever grouped in one case since the government started putting militants on trial before military tribunals in late 1992. The fact that the defendants included five women, for the first time in such cases, was another factor that gave the trial additional publicity.

It was also at the opening session of this trial on 5 July that one of the defendants, Mohamed Abdel-Alim, announced the controversial cease-fire appeal by imprisoned Gama'a and Jihad leaders who are serving life terms for their roles in the assassination of the late President Anwar El-Sadat in 1981. He quoted the "historic" leaders of the two groups as saying that they appealed to their followers to stop unilaterally all anti-government attacks inside and outside Egypt.

Despite signs from the government that it would welcome a halt to violence, particularly after the cease-fire appeal won the support of the Gama'a's spiritual guide Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is imprisoned in New York, Interior Minister Hassan Al-Alfi later ruled out any dialogue with "terrorists and thugs." Gama'a leaders living abroad had opposed the call for ending violence, and their followers hiding in sugar cane fields in southern Egypt did not stop their attacks against policemen.

This division, and the fact that the militants' attacks continued, led some observers to believe that the whole matter was nothing but a ploy by Islamist lawyers to influence the military court and allow the defendants to get away with light sentences.

If this was a ploy, it failed.

The judge opened the concluding session earlier than usual. Before handing down the sentences, he read out a statement, lashing out at militant groups, and describing their young members as deceived and brain-washed by expatriate leaders who provide the necessary funding. He added that those "young, ignorant extremists have imposed themselves as judges, issuing orders of killing and terror. They have nothing to do with Islam and its merciful teachings. On the contrary, they damage the name of this great religion."

According to a standard practice, the judge began with the acquittals and lighter sentences, ending up with capital punishment. Twenty-five militants, including a woman, were acquitted. A 55-year-old mother of four was sentenced to one year, five defendants to three years, nine, including two women, to five years, six to seven years, 16 to 10 years, 23, including a woman, to 15 years, eight to life imprisonment and four to death. Charges were dropped against one defendant after he died in prison shortly before the case opened. Abdel-Alim, the Gama'a spokesman during the trial, was among those sentenced to 15 years.

When the names of the acquitted 25 were being read out, sighs of relief and the words *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great) could be heard from the defendants kept in a large cage covered by wire. When the sentences became harsher, there was silence. This silence was followed by angry shouts and anti-government slogans immediately after the judge read out the names of those sentenced to death.

The young militants, mostly bearded and dressed in white, turned towards those who were sentenced to death to congratulate them. One of the four, Mohamed Fawzi, has attended all sessions of the trial in a red prison costume given to those on death row because he had been condemned to death in an earlier trial last year. Fawzi was convicted of killing a police officer in the city of Suez.

"I do not care," he said before the sentences were pronounced. "I cannot be killed twice." Fawzi said that in a farewell party his "brothers" gave him in prison before Monday's session, they were joking which of the two death sentences should be carried out: the one handed down last year by the State Security Court or the one they expected to be passed by the military court.

Fawzi told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he did not feel sorry for what he did. "I am proud, and my family is proud. I am going to die for the cause I fought for." He then joined the other defendants in shouting slogans announcing their support for Omar Abdel-Rahman as their leader. "Prison and execution will not distance us from Islam," they also shouted.

Mohamed Mustafa Ismail, another militant sentenced to death, said: "I am a winner. I will go to heaven with other martyrs." Asked what he would tell his three children, Ismail said that they should follow their father's path.

But this was not the reaction of the wife of Ahmed Abdel-Fattah, a third militant sentenced to death. She stood outside the court with her 6-year-old daughter crying over the fate of her husband. "Death sentences are not useful. They only generate more anger and frustration," she said.

Mosheer Abdel-Samad, an Islamist lawyer who attended the session, told reporters he had expected an even larger number of defendants to be condemned to death. But he criticised the sentences against the women, saying they were "too harsh." He explained that most of those women "fell under the pressure of their husbands," and were forced to hide the explosives seized in their possession.

Montasser El-Zayyat, another lawyer who led efforts to convince the government that the cease-fire appeal issued by the Gama'a leaders should be taken seriously, also criticised the sentences as harsh. He said the judges did not consider the good-will gesture offered by the Gama'a leaders and that the sentences might jeopardise his efforts to gain additional support for a halt to violence.

Abdel-Alim, asked how the sentences would affect the cease-fire initiative, did not show much interest. "We issued an appeal to stop violence, and you have the result. More death and life imprisonment sentences," he said. He added, however, that the leaders in prison continue to be committed to their call and tried to find excuses for expatriate leaders who opposed the initiative. "There is a lack of communication. They cannot believe that this initiative was taken voluntarily," he added.

Journalists convicted of slander

A Cairo court has sentenced three Egyptian and three Saudi journalists — five of them in absentia — to imprisonment for slandering President Mubarak's two sons

The Abdin Misdemeanours Court sentenced in absentia on Sunday three Saudi Arabian and two Egyptian journalists, working for the London-based Saudi daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, to one year imprisonment with hard labour after finding them guilty of slandering the two sons of President Hosni Mubarak, reports **Khaled Dawoud**. The five were also fined LE20,000 each. A sixth journalist working for the local opposition daily *Al-Wafd* was sentenced to six months imprisonment and fined LE15,000 after he was convicted on the same charges.

The court ordered the six to pay Alaa and Gamal Mubarak LE501 in temporary compensation which, according to Egyptian law, means that the Mubaraks have the right to sue the Saudi newspaper for damages.

The court set bail at LE1,000 each, pending an appeal before a higher court.

A week before the sentences were handed down, several top lawyers for the five London-based Saudi and Egyptian journalists walked out in protest of what they claimed was an attempt by the court to rush hearings.

Al-Sharq Al-Awsat also decided to close down its Cairo offices where more than 100 Egyptians work for the newspaper and 12 sister publications.

The drama unfolded in May when *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* ran a full-page advertisement to promote its sister publication, *Al-Jadida* magazine, declaring that its first issue included an article which exposed how Mubarak's sons used their father's position to make lucrative business deals.

On the following day, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* published a retraction as well as an apology to Mubarak's sons for the "false allegations" made a day earlier and announced that the magazine's appearance would be delayed for 24 hours.

A new edition of the magazine appeared a day behind schedule without the article on the Mubaraks' alleged business deals.

Alaa and Gamal Mubarak rejected the newspaper's apology and insisted on going to court on the grounds that an apology cannot make up for the damage done to their reputation. They sued the Saudi publishers of *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, Hesham and Mohamed Ali Hafez; the Saudi editor-in-chief of *Al-Jadida*, Othman Al-Omayer; and two senior London-based Egyptian editors, Fawziya Salama and Gamal Ismail, who worked for *Al-Jadida*. The only defendant present throughout the trial was *Al-Wafd* reporter, Sayed Abdel-Ati, who freelanced for *Al-Jadida* and contributed the article on Mubarak's sons. Both Salama and Ismail were fired from *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* after the paper's management claimed that they were responsible for running the advertisement and the article.

Judge Mustafa Gawish, after handing down the sentences, told reporters that he gave five defendants the maximum penalty because the prosecutor managed to prove that they intentionally published false information and that they were all involved in approving the publication of the advertisement and the article.

The judge added that he passed a lighter sentence against the *Al-Wafd* journalist because he proved that his article was altered by the London-based editors to make it more sensational.

"After reviewing all the related laws and amendments, the court found that the maximum penalty is one year and the minimum is six months. According to the same laws, imprisonment is a must for all defendants," the judge told dozens of reporters who filled his room after the sentences were announced.

Since hearings opened in July, the lawyers of the five London-based Saudi and Egyptian journalists have insisted that the court had no jurisdiction to hear the case and argued that the trial should be held in London, where their clients live and the newspaper is based, rather than in Egypt.

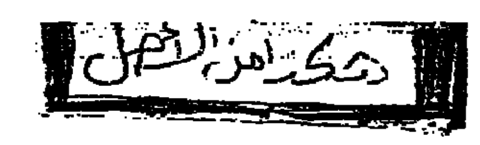
Abdel-Ati's lawyers, meanwhile, tried to distance him from the other defendants, filing a separate lawsuit against the five, claiming that their client's interests were damaged by the alterations introduced to his article.

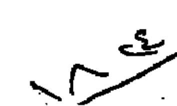
Judge Gawish rejected the argument that the case should be heard in London on the grounds the article was written by a Cairo-based reporter and that *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* and its sister publications are circulated all over the country. He also rejected the lawsuit filed by Abdel-Ati against *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*.

Abdel-Ati's lawyer, Sayed Abu Zeid, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the sentence passed against his client was "very harsh." He promised to file an appeal with a higher court.

Before the sentences were handed down, *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* said that it had no intention to contest the verdict. But a lawyer for the group, Mohamed Asfour, later affirmed that he would file an appeal.

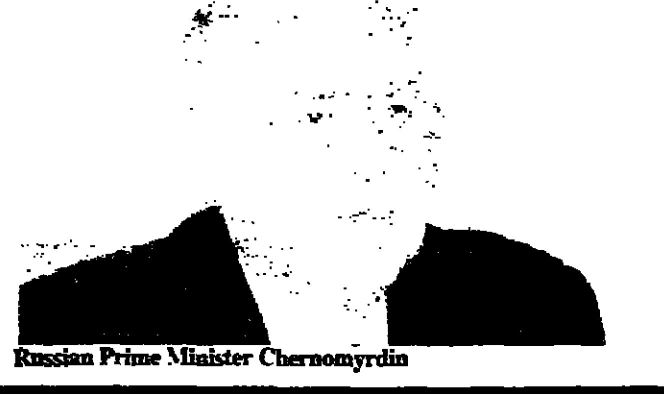
The conservative *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* uses sophisticated satellite technology that allows it to be printed in several countries at the same time and has its special site on the Internet. Such facts, according to the prosecutor, added to the damage caused to Alaa and Gamal Mubarak.





Forging a Cairo-Moscow partnership

Egypt and Russia are working to forge a new partnership, says Viktor Chernomyrdin. The Russian prime minister spoke to **Abdel-Malek Khalil** in an exclusive interview in Moscow



Russian Prime Minister Chernomyrdin

President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Moscow will take Egyptian-Russian relations to a higher level of partnership and cooperation, including cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries, says Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. In an exclusive interview which is published concurrently in both the *Al-Ahram* and *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Chernomyrdin said the two countries were laying down the "contractual foundations" of a new relationship, now that their ideological differences have been removed with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The interview with Chernomyrdin, 59, was the first granted to an Egyptian newspaper by such a high Russian official for 30 years. Chernomyrdin, an oil expert who became Prime Minister in 1993, is likely to be a candidate for the presidency once President Boris Yeltsin's term expires in the year 2000.

Chernomyrdin stressed that Egypt and Russia are approaching "a highly important landmark because we are about to complete the laying down of new contractual foundations for our joint cooperation. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, reformulating our bilateral relations became imperative," he explained.

Mubarak's talks with Yeltsin, during the upcoming visit, "will take our relations to a higher level of partnership," Chernomyrdin stated, adding that agreements on scientific and technological cooperation, shipping, the prevention of dual taxation and the protection of investments will be signed.

Chernomyrdin pointed at the "glorious traditions of our joint friendship," recalling that Soviet experts provided assistance to Egypt in building such mega-projects as the Aswan High Dam and the Helwan iron and steel complex. "But our relations now are different from those at the time of the Soviet Union," he said, and went on to add: "New and promising trends for cooperation have emerged, including cooperation between the private sectors in the two countries. Our cooperation has become easier and wider following the disappearance of ideological differences."

Chernomyrdin underlined the necessity of "enriching our cooperation with a new content, primarily related to cooperation between [private] organisations and entrepreneurs, which is bound to add to the vitality of our relations. In this context, we attach special importance to establishing a commercial-industrial chamber."

Chernomyrdin cited a plan by Egyptian industrialist Ibrahim Kamel to equip Russian Tu-204 planes with British Rolls Royce engines, thus combining the best of Russian and Western technologies. The scheme will provide hundreds of Tupolev workers with work opportunities and new expertise. The new plane is expected to be highly competitive because its price, of $38 million, is said to be 40 per cent lower than its Western-made competitors.

Chernomyrdin was effusive in praising Egypt's efforts to promote a comprehensive peace in the Middle East to which, he said, Russia remains firmly committed. "We highly esteem the Egyptian effort," he said. "Egypt spearheads the search for appropriate solutions to the Arab-Israeli dispute. We see how active, useful and effective is the role played by our Egyptian friends, particularly in the Palestinian-Israeli direction. We are ready to continue our cooperation and strengthen our efforts, with the aim of warding off any retreat from a peace settlement. Our joint efforts run in the same direction. We firmly stand against any deviation by the Israeli leadership from the form and principles of the Madrid conference, the Oslo agreements and the principle of trading land for peace. Russia, as a sponsor of the peace process, maintains contacts with all the concerned parties and takes the appropriate positions to correct the situation and revive negotiations on all tracks."

Asked about the prospects of a visit to Egypt, Chernomyrdin responded: "It has been, and it remains, my dream to see the famous features of Ancient Egyptian civilisation and also to get to know Egyptians, their traditions and culture, better. Also, I have heard about the great successes of our Egyptian friends in reforming the Egyptian economy. I am eager to learn about these successes at close range."

In addition to the economic partnership between Russia and Egypt, Chernomyrdin spoke of a "strategic partnership" which he defined as "active and deeper cooperation on the international scene with the aim of promoting peace, abstaining from the use of force or the threat of using force, and opposing all types of extremisms." The features of joint action in this connection, he said, were defined at the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit of March 1996 which gathered Mubarak and Yeltsin together with other world leaders, including US President Bill Clinton.

"I am confident that the success of our political cooperation will be useful in improving the situation in the Middle Eastern region and throughout the whole world," Chernomyrdin said and concluded by calling for "mutual enrichment and interaction between the great Russian and Arab cultures."

World MPs demand universal democracy

Parliamentarians from around the world have met in Cairo and issued a declaration urging democracy. **Gamal Essam El-Din** followed the debates



Sorour congratulates Martinez for being elected as IPU chairman

Two principal issues — democracy and employment — dominated the agenda of the 98th conference of the Geneva-based Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) which brought together about 1,600 parliamentarians from 138 countries to Cairo this week. The five-day conference ended on Tuesday with a "universal declaration on democracy."

The declaration upholds the fundamentals of democracy and human rights, including the right of women to participate in decision-making. It underlines the importance of setting in motion the principles embodied in an IPU declaration adopted in Paris on 26 March 1994 concerning the criteria for fair and free elections. These include the right of every citizen to vote and run for election on a non-discriminatory basis and the need to maintain transparency throughout the election process.

The declaration calls for increased interaction between parliaments and the public and urges political parties and interest groups to encourage such interaction. "Democracy should be a constant element of daily life. It is not a mere expression of the will of the electorate but... the epitomisation of the rule of the law," the declaration says.

Employment was the second topic on the IPU agenda. The conference underscored the principles formulated by the International Labour Organisation concerning fundamental labour rights. It urged speedy measures to protect the labour force in developing countries from the negative effects of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the transition to market economies.

On its final day, the conference elected as IPU chairman Miguel Angel Martinez, a 57-year-old Spaniard who has served since 1996 as vice-president of the governing board of the Spanish group in IPU. Martinez replaced Ahmed Fathi Sorour, speaker of Egypt's People's Assembly, whose three-year, non-renewable term expired last Monday.

Martinez won 127 votes of a total of 220 against 43 for Eduardo Menem, president of the Argentine Senate, and 88 for Purno Agitok Sangma, speaker of the Lower House of the People of India. Menem withdrew following a first round of voting in which Martinez got 99 against 82 for Sangma. A candidate has to get 113 votes to be eligible for the post.

The IPU's Arab group supported Sangma on the grounds that parliamentarians from Africa and Asia were elected only five times for the presidency of IPU, compared to 15 times for parliamentarians from Europe and Latin America. Egypt has submitted a proposal on the necessity of rotating the presidency among IPU's geographical groups on a periodical basis.

Contrary to expectations, the IPU's Arab group failed to secure the Palestinian National Council (PNC) full membership of IPU. The PNC gained provisional membership during an IPU conference held in South Korea last April. Zoheir Handouta, a PNC member, vowed that the Palestinians will continue their efforts to gain full membership at the next IPU conference, due to be held in April in Namibia. The IPU admitted Fiji and restored the membership of Belarus.

The Middle East peace process was also discussed at the IPU Conference. President Hosni Mubarak, addressing the opening ceremony last Thursday, called for "decisive and crucial stances" and "tangible acts and deeds" for achieving peace in the Middle East, not just "flowery words and promises." Mubarak also called on the world's parliaments to ensure that the new world order takes into consideration the needs of all peoples and cultures. "Each of us is required to effectively and positively share in formulating this new system of basic principles, values and rules. No group should assume this task alone, irrespective of its good intentions, power, or degree of progress and potentials."

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, in an address to the conference, strongly criticised the policies of the current Israeli government, accusing it of disregarding "all the principles upon which the peace process in the Middle East is based." Egypt, he said, repeatedly warned that these policies will fan the flames of extremism in the region."

Israeli policies were also severely criticised by members of at least 30 parliaments. Dan Tichon, head of Israel's three-member delegation, had to appeal to delegates "not to isolate Israel at the conference."

Speaker Sorour has rejected an Israeli invitation for a group of Egyptian parliamentarians to visit the Israeli Knesset. Sorour emphasised that the visit is conditional on the full implementation by Israel of the Oslo agreements. Sorour also rejected an attempt by the Israeli delegation to put the issue of the convicted Israeli spy Azzam Azzam on the conference's human rights agenda. The Israeli delegation walked out of the session to protest a speech by Egyptian parliamentarian Yassin Seraggeddin, who appealed for action against the "massacres" perpetrated by the Israelis in Lebanon and Jerusalem and their killing of Egyptian war prisoners during previous wars.

The confrontation between Israel and the Arab delegations reached its peak during a vote on the third main topic of discussion on the conference's agenda. Arab parliamentarians supported a Lebanese proposal calling for "the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon."

Israel's Dan Tichon objected, claiming that Israel had tried unsuccessfully to find a way for the Lebanese to take effective control of their own country. Unless this happens, he said, Israel had "a right to defend its own territory."

Sexual abuse of children, a theme suggested by Australian parliamentarians, defeated the Lebanese proposal to become the third topic on the conference's agenda.

Inter-Arab disputes were not absent from the conference. At least three verbal exchanges broke out between the Kuwaiti and Iraqi representatives. Ahmed Al-Saadoun, speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, complained about the continued detention of a large number of Kuwaiti nationals in Iraq. Iraq's Ghanem Aziz Khadouri said Iraq will never succumb to Kuwaiti "blackmail."

The Arab group was unanimous in criticising the US Congress for declining to attend the IPU conference. Tojan Al-Faisal, a Jordanian parliamentarian, pointed out that the US Congress wants to half its $1 million contribution to the IPU's budget and amend the dates of IPU gatherings to coincide with the Congress' summer recess.

Several Egyptian opposition parties, human rights groups and intellectuals submitted to IPU's Human Rights Committee a memorandum alleging "wide-scale rigging of Egyptian parliamentary elections during November and December, 1995."

The memorandum claims that the Egyptian parliament has rejected more than 200 court rulings invalidating the membership of 152 deputies. Speaker Sorour responded by saying that the IPU is solely interested in cases where parliamentarians are unable to perform their legislative duties due to interference by the executive branches.

Sorour revealed that IPU received 78 complaints from parliamentarians alleging that their governments arrested or tortured them to prevent them from speaking their mind in parliament. The Arab complaints came primarily from Sudan and Palestine.

Egyptian parliamentarian Yassin Seraggeddin told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the IPU conference proved to the world that Egypt is free from terrorism. But Seraggeddin was less upbeat about the effectiveness of the IPU, which, he said, has no power to back its resolutions, least of all concerning democracy. "If anything, the IPU provides an obvious and tragic evidence that parliaments have the right to talk but no power to translate their words into deeds," said Seraggeddin.

Book ban revoked

Intellectuals breathed a sigh of relief after a Cairo court decided to repeal the confiscation of a book which Al-Azhar considered insulting to Islam. **Amira Howeidy** reports

Publishers of Sayed El-Qemni's book *Rabb Al-Zaman* (The Lord of All Time) are preparing to launch a second edition after a Cairo court decided on Monday to revoke the book's confiscation. Acting on a complaint by Al-Azhar's Islamic Research Academy, state security authorities had removed copies of the book from bookstore shelves a month earlier. The Academy said the book dealt contemptuously with Joseph, the Biblical figure whom Muslims revere as a prophet, and Caliph Othman ibn Affan, a companion of the Prophet Mohamed.

Judge Salam Selim, who revoked the confiscation order, said the book contained "stories about the prophets" as well as "reflections by the author." But he found nothing offensive to Islam or any other religion in it.

"Freedom of expression, within the limits of the law, is guaranteed" by the Constitution, the judge said. "Even assuming that the author erred, there was no ill will on his part that deserves punishment. He did not insult religion or show contempt towards it."

El-Qemni responded by saying "I never doubted for one minute that the ruling will be in my favour, despite everyone's pessimism." The court had to take this "historic" decision, he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, because he did not hold religion in contempt.

"I seize this opportunity to dedicate this great victory in the battle of enlightenment and freedom to my friend, Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid," El-Qemni said.

Abu Zeid, a Cairo University professor now living in self-imposed exile in the Netherlands, was ordered by a Cairo court to divorce his wife in 1995 on the grounds that his writings amounted to apostasy. After the confiscation of El-Qemni's book, many intellectuals feared he would face the same fate as Abu Zeid.

"I was optimistic because I was convinced that if I retracted my beliefs, it could mean that I was wrong," El-Qemni said. "This is why I had the courage to stand up for all my ideas."

Asked if there was a possibility his other books might be confiscated, El-Qemni responded: "This is very likely, but I am a fierce fighter and I promise them that they will be defeated."

Amir Salem, one of El-Qemni's lawyers, described the court's decision as "unprecedented. It refuted all the Academy's accusations and encouraged intellectuals to express themselves freely," Salem said.

El-Qemni, 50, is the author of 10 books. *Rabb El-Zaman* came out last year and sold between 3,000 and 4,000 copies, his publisher told the *Weekly*. By the time police confiscated the book last month, only 20 copies were on bookstore shelves. But following the court order, publisher Madbouli El-Saghir is preparing to print a second edition.

"The confiscation gave publicity to the book and we have been receiving many orders," said Mohamed El-Sayed, the publisher's manager. "People usually chase after whatever is prohibited. In this sense, El-Qemni was lucky."

The book compiled articles which appeared in various newspapers and magazines in 1992 and 1993. "Ironically, no one found those articles offensive to Islam four years ago, but when they appeared in book form, the Academy decided to take action," Salem said.

The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) had launched a media campaign immediately after the confiscation, accusing Al-Azhar of imposing a "form of unacceptable religious guardianship on the conscience of thinkers, writers and other creators." The EOHR also said it denounced the "increasingly censorious role" played by the Academy.

The Academy was recently reported to have recommended the confiscation of dozens of books, many of which do not deal with religion. But the report was never officially confirmed.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

Albright's visit ends on a hopeful note

The positive reaction by Arab officials to Madeleine Albright's tour of the region contrasted with the climate of pessimism which prevailed before her visit, writes **Nevine Khalil**

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright received a warm welcome this week as she arrived in Egypt on the fourth leg of her debut tour of the Middle East.

President Hosni Mubarak, who met with Albright in Alexandria, praised her approach as "encouraging, balanced and gives hope for the peace process to move forward."

Similar notes of praise were struck by Albright's Arab hosts in Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon. "Something fresh is in the air," said Jordan's King Hussein. "Brave and frank," was how Saudi Crown Prince Abdulla bin Abdel-Aziz described his talks with the American secretary of state. Even Lebanese officials were encouraged by the secretary's brief and unscheduled visit to Beirut, viewing it as a sign of renewed US interest in Lebanon.

At the start of her tour of the Palestinian self-rule areas and six Middle Eastern countries, Albright's trip, at first, was seen more as an attempt to force Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to crack down on Hamas militants than to revive the stalled peace process. The climate of pessimism was underlined by the fact that the secretary of state's first visit to the region came just a few days after two suicide bombings that killed 20 Israelis in Jerusalem.

Albright's face-saving move came about as a result of her position on the thorny issue of Israeli settlements and her reiteration of the principle of exchanging land for peace which succeeded, at least temporarily, in restoring some Arab faith in US effectiveness as a peace broker.

In a speech to Israeli students on the second day of her visit to Israel — Albright's first port of call — she dropped what the Israeli media described as a "bombshell", calling upon Israel to declare a "time-out" in its policy of expanding Jewish settlements on grounds that such construction was viewed as provocative by the Palestinians.

Arab leaders who met Albright said their governments were impressed not only by Albright's comments on settlements but also by her public reaffirmation of US policies that have been disregarded by the Clinton administration as of late, such as the land-for-peace principle.

In Syria, which Albright visited briefly for talks with President Hafez Al-Assad, there was a mild tone of optimism sparked by renewed US interest in reviving the talks between Damascus and Israel. Albright will meet Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa in New York during the coming UN General Assembly meeting next week for further discussions.

Lebanese officials, while pleased that Albright included Beirut in her tour, were frustrated by the fact that the US secretary did not call upon Israel to withdraw from south Lebanon in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said that although hopes for an effective US role were low before Albright's visit, "the secretary of state has shown that there is a new even-handed policy" which goes beyond addressing Israel's security concerns. "The US is reaffirming its position as the sponsor of the peace process," Moussa said. "They are talking to the Palestinians, the Israelis and the Syrians in accordance with the rules of the game. This is important."

Moussa was careful to note, however, that despite the renewed hopes triggered by Albright's visit, the peace process itself remained at its lowest point since the beginning of Arab-Israeli negotiations.

"Some people might say that we are now returning to the beginning [of peace talks]. But what can we do? There is no alternative," Moussa told reporters.

Soon after Albright's stop-over in Alexandria, a flurry of consultations began in earnest among Arab leaders. Arafat arrived in Cairo for talks with President Mubarak and Syria's Al-Assad is expected to arrive in Egypt today.

After his talks with Mubarak on Tuesday, Arafat said that they both believe Albright's tour was "positive... because she stressed the US's support for the land-for-peace formula and condemned Israel's unilateral actions of building settlements and other actions taken in Jerusalem."

But Albright herself conceded that her tour did not make much progress towards restarting the negotiations. It did, however, indicate that the peace process is not dead.

The US secretary said that "big steps" were still needed. The talks between US, Israeli and Palestinian officials scheduled for next week in Washington should provide an opportunity to explore ways to substantiate the emerging hopes.

"I am not going to pretend that I have accomplished a great deal... The crisis of confidence is very severe, it requires a great deal of work to rebuild the trust," said Albright.

Whatever their praise of Albright's tour, Arab countries remained committed to what they see as an equitable way of conducting peace negotiations with Israel. Arab countries clearly told the US secretary of state that they will not take part in any regional arrangements or meetings with Israel so long as there is no progress in the peace process.

Albright was hoping to convince Arab countries — particularly Washington's close Gulf Arab allies — to attend the fourth Middle East and North Africa Economic Conference (MENA IV), slated for November in Doha, Qatar.

In his joint press conference with Albright, Mubarak did not rule out the possibility of Egypt participating in the Doha meeting if the situation improves in the next two months.

"We still have some time," Mubarak said in reference to MENA IV. "If there is progress in the peace process, this will help the conference to be held at a higher level."

Albright faced a similar stand during her meeting with the GCC foreign ministers in Abha. Saudi Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal told reporters that "the participation of Arab countries in multilateral talks and economic conferences is related to the stands of the Israeli government towards the peace process."

"What is important is not economic conferences that we are invited to or multilateral talks. What is important is to concentrate on the peace process, because other activities are not an alternative," Al-Faisal said.

Qatar announced that it will hold the meeting on time. But diplomatic sources told the *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the possibility of postponing the meeting cannot be discarded. The issue will be subject to further consideration among Arab foreign ministers, who will be in Cairo for an Arab League meeting on Saturday. Arab foreign ministers are also expected to bring up the subject with US officials during the next UN General Assembly meeting.

Revolutionary Guard leader down but not out

The dismissal of Iran's influential commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Mohsen Rezai, might be another sign of moderation in the policies of the Iranian government, writes Hussein Al-Qassimi

When Iran was at war with Iraq throughout most of the 1980s, Maj. Gen. Mohsen Rezai, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's most trusted aide. He was also Iran's most-feared man.

At the time, Rezai had over 150,000 zealous militants under his command, ready to obey his orders to either smash through the formidable Iraqi defence lines or crush any domestic resistance to the regime.

Rezai's lack of formal military training did not stop him from making it to the top as a faithful follower of Khomeini and his Islamic revolutionary ideals. He was soon to become one of the pillars of the Islamic regime.

When Khomeini died in 1989, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's new supreme spiritual leader, kept Rezai in his powerful post and included him in his close circle of confidantes. Rezai's position was entrenched among Iran's powerful radicals, the elite ideologues who had ruled Iran with iron will for nearly 18 years.

But last week Khamenei suddenly relieved Rezai from his influential post and made him a member of the Expediency Council, one of several institutions in Iran which advises and watches the government. This was no promotion for a man who for nearly two decades controlled the country's most powerful paramilitary force. Rezai's successor has not yet been named.

Iranian media gave no reason for the move, presenting it instead as a routine change. A few days later, Rezai claimed that he resigned voluntarily because he felt that his mission as Guards commander had been accomplished. But it is easier to believe that he was forced to resign following the inauguration last month of Mohamed Khatami as Iran's new president. Rezai was among the hard-line leaders who opposed the moderate Khatami and supported his conservative rival, speaker of the Parliament Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri.

It is not yet clear if the replacement of Rezai was due to direct pressure from Khatami himself, or if Khamenei initiated the move to avoid friction between a moderate president and a hard-line top aide.

Khatami, a peaceful reformer, won the latest presidential elections in May by a 70 per cent majority on a platform of respect for human and civic rights at home and improved relations abroad. His record of moderation signalled the Iranians' hunger for a genuine change and was widely interpreted as a rebuke to conservative Ayatollahs.

Khatami promised his people political reform, social openness and justice. His political and cultural message raised the expectations of the majority of Iranians, especially the youth.

The question now is, how much change Khatami will be able to introduce. A significant part of Iranian political power still rests in Khamenei's hands. The conservative, anti-Western supreme spiritual leader still has the final say in Iran's foreign policy and military affairs.

It is too early to assess the full implications of the change in the Revolutionary Guards' hierarchy. More evidence is needed to show that Iran under Khatami is changing 18 years after the Islamic revolution.

For many Iranians, the absence of hard-line officials like Rezai from key government and military posts represents a victory for the principles which have been championed by Khatami. Many Iranians, however, still fear a backlash from the traditionalists that could undermine Khatami's efforts to open up Iranian society.

Iranians still remember the reactionaries who, in 1992, forced Khatami out of office following 11 years as culture minister during which he encouraged literature and cinema they considered too permissive.

Rezai's intention to remain active in politics could be an indication that the hardliners in the religious establishment, and those who still control the parliament and the Guards, are not going to go quietly into the night. For example, Rezai can use his new position as the secretary-general of the Expediency Council to undermine the presidential reform schemes. In a recent interview, Rezai made it clear that his priority will be to ensure that "the leader's [Khamenei's] decisions and guidelines are fully implemented."

Reports from Iran suggest that Rezai might be planning to stand in the next presidential elections scheduled for 2001. If so, he better be prepared for a long and daunting battle in an Iran likely to be different from the one that we know today.

Israel targets Lebanon's army

As US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright rounded off her tour of the region in Lebanon, renewed clashes brought death once more to the south of the country. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut

Blood flowed freely in south Lebanon last weekend as Israeli ground and air forces pounded a Lebanese army position in the front-line village of Araab Saleem, killing six Lebanese soldiers, including an officer and a civilian woman. But the weekend's total death tally came to 12, as other incidents of violence claimed the lives of six other people.

For Israel, this was the country's first deliberate attack on a Lebanese army post. But even this bit of macabre trivia was overshadowed by the timing of the attack, which coincided with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's tour of the region. Albright's tour aimed at reviving the stalled Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.

The attack, however, was the latest in a spate of killings and other violence that have struck hard at the people of this ravaged area in Lebanon. Hours before Israeli troops stormed the Lebanese army's post, Hadi Nasrallah, the eldest son of Hizbollah's Secretary-General Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, was killed along with another resistance fighter in clashes with Israeli soldiers. A third Hizbollah fighter is also still missing.

Hadi's body was retrieved by Israeli troops, fueling speculations that his corpse will be used as a bargaining chip in exchange for the remains of an Israeli soldier killed in the Ansariyeh battle.

Before Hadi's death, the International Red Cross had been negotiating a swap between Israel and Lebanon in which the body of an Israeli commando, captured during the fighting in Ansariyeh, would be returned in exchange for the release of Lebanese detainees in Israeli prisons.

Hizbollah has ruled out the possibility of a body swap benefiting Israel.

The Iranian-backed Hizbollah responded to Hadi's death by setting off a roadside bomb in south Lebanon, killing two Israeli soldiers.

But the assault on the Lebanese army, has itself prompted a bevy of interpretations.

Lebanese Army Chief of Staff General Emile Lahoud called it revenge for the army's participation in the thwarted Israeli commando operation in Ansariyeh earlier this month in which 12 Israeli's were killed.

"The death of our soldiers will motivate us to continue the struggle against occuption," Lahoud said while inspecting the sight of the attack. "We rely on our power to defend our legal rights."

Lebanese Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz accused Israel of attacking the army to divert attention from the heavy casualties it suffered in the conflict which he dubbed "Israel's Vietnam".

This year, Israel suffered its heaviest losses in Lebanon, with 33 soldiers killed, including the 12 who died in the Ansariyeh operation outside the occupied zone. Another 73 were also killed when two Israeli helicopters collided on the way to Lebanon.

The resulting death toll has sparked off an internal debate in Israel over the viability of maintaining its occupied zone in southern Lebanon.

As a sign of increasing domestic pressure, Israel's Interior Minister Avigdor Kahalani told Israeli radio that Israel should bomb Beirut, targeting the city's infrastructure and utilities services, whenever resistance fighters attack Israeli troops in the occupied zone in south Lebanon. The goal: to prompt the Lebanese government to rein in Hizbollah guerrillas.

The Israeli daily *Haaretz* also quoted Israeli General David Tsoor as saying that Israel suggested that its army and Hizbollah reach an agreement to stop using roadside bombs in south Lebanon. These bombs are among the most effective weapon utilised by the resistance movement.

The suggestion, however, was shot down by Syria and Lebanon during a meeting of the five-nation ceasefire monitoring group, Tsoor told the newspaper.

While some Israeli security sources denied that the attack was the beginning of an Israeli policy to drag the Lebanese army into the conflict, an Israeli army spokesman refused to rule out other similar attacks.

"We do not want to hit the army regularly, but we will do so whenever it fires and puts our soldiers in danger," he said.

The Lebanese army does not take part in fighting in the south, but usually fires at Israeli warplanes and helicopters that operate in Lebanese airspace. Its weapons, however, have little impact in the face of the more sophisticated Israeli arms.



Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah makes his way to a gathering on Sunday with the families of Hizbollah fighters killed during clashes with Israeli soldiers. Pictures of those killed, including his 18-year-old son, Hadi, are hung on the wall behind Nasrallah *(photo: AFP)*

Still others interpreted the attack differently. Abdel-Latif Al-Zein, a parliamentary deputy representing the south, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the attack was a message to the Lebanese government, and a bid to drive a wedge between Syria and Lebanon. Both countries are currently coordinating peace moves.

"Israeli criminal acts are not unusual," said Al-Zein. "It wants to empty the south of its residents and the army."

Arguing that Israel does not want peace, and that Secretary of State Albright had "surrendered to Israel", Al-Zein stated that "the attack against the army will not deter us from fighting occuption."

"The army's role in aborting Israel's commando raid on Ansariyeh was an obstacle to Israel, and it wants to send a message to the authorities that the army must stay out of the conflict."

Hizbollah, despite the losses it has suffered, seems undaunted. In a speech during a rally, attended by thousands, Nasrallah said that the loss of his son was no different than those losses other families of resistance fighters feel.

"I tell the families of the martyrs whose sons' bodies are being held by the enemy, that we are in a partnership," he said in a statement that indicates that the recovery of his son's body is not an immediate priority for the group.

The struggle against Israel, he said, would go on.

Despite the tension, however, efforts were under way to ameliorate the situation. In Beirut, Albright said a comprehensive peace is the only way to end the cycle of violence in south Lebanon.

"Israel, Syria and Lebanon have all expressed willingness to resume talks, but are unable to agree upon the basis of negotiations," she said.

Only days before Albright's arrival in Lebanon, Prime Minster Rafik Al-Hariri said Israel, Syria and Lebanon would be able to reach an agreement in three months if Israel announced its willingness to withdraw from occupied south Lebanon.

Albright said she wanted to wrap up her regional tour with a visit to Lebanon in order to affirm that "this tiny Arab country was essential for a comprehensive peace settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict."

King impatient with Hamas

The detention of Ibrahim Ghosheh, Hamas spokesman in Jordan, was a clear message to the Islamist opposition of what the authorities are capable of doing even to old allies. **Lola Keilaini** reports from Amman

The massive support Jordan's Islamist movement gives Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, has never been a secret. Jordan's largest Islamist group, the Muslim Brotherhood, its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF), and the Islamic parliamentary bloc have always patronised and subsidised Hamas financially, morally and politically.

The now detained Hamas spokesman, Ibrahim Ghosheh, used to hold his press briefings in the Islamist parliamentarians' offices because they enjoy legal immunity. Hamas members were also allowed free movement and the right to organise public rallies in which their views opposing the peace process were aired and cheered.

According to political analysts, the government's decision to arrest and detain Ghosheh, last week, has forced a dialogue within the inner circles of the Muslim Brotherhood on the negative consequences of their decision to boycott the upcoming parliamentary elections and the heavy price they have to pay when they distance themselves from royal grace. The boycott had been advocated by the ideological hawks of the Islamist movement in Jordan, including Ghosheh himself.

The Islamists, by voting themselves out, lost the podium through which they used to intercede with the authorities regarding the detention of Hamas members, to solicit mediation and ask for urgently needed political favours. Such a link with the palace resulted in the king mediating with Washington to insure the release of Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzouk from US jails.

"With their decision to boycott [parliamentary elections] they have no more influence," said Shaker Jouhari, a political analyst.

Ghosheh, one of the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, has been one of the intellectual and historical ideologists of the Jordanian Islamist movement even though he disconnected himself from its administrative and organisational apparatus.

The Islamist movement attributed Ghosheh's detention to the visit of US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to the region. Jamil Abu Bakir, spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood's political bureau, said that the detention was an arbitrary measure by the Jordanian authorities and an act of accommodation to Israeli demands. "The detention is a result of US pressures and manipulation. Washington would like the Arab regimes to shoulder all the responsibility for the security of Israel in the region. It is pushing Arab regimes to protect the enemy that is mounting aggressive measures," he said.

Mohamed Nazal, another prominent representative of Hamas in Jordan, rejected the official pretext of protection of national security for detaining Ghosheh. He said that it was obvious that the detention was due to political reasons associated with the visit of Albright.

As for the government, it announced that the detention was due to activities undertaken by Ghosheh that threatened the national interest. Minister of State for Information Samir Mutawi stated that Ghosheh was arrested for a statement he made earlier this week in which he said that his group would continue the armed struggle as long as "there are Palestinian prisoners inside Israel." The minister explained that "Ghosheh had been arrested in relation to statements he made which go beyond the bounds and commitment of the Jordanian law, under which he has been given permission to stay in Jordan."

The official statement was ridiculed by Islamist groups who asserted that there is no such thing as a permission to stay since Ghosheh, originally a Palestinian, has been a full-fledged Jordanian citizen since 1948.

Abdel-Majid Zunybat, the Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Guide, rejected the Jordanian government's argument and lodged a complaint with Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour. Zunybat condemned Mutawi's statements and described them as "dangerous". He warned that the comments made by the Jordanian minister reflected negatively on the fabric of Jordanian-Palestinian national unity.

Zunybat was critically sarcastic when he raised the question of whether a Palestinian carrying a Jordanian citizenship in Jordan only has temporary residency. Zunybat also conceded in statements earlier this week that his efforts to mediate the release of Ghosheh have failed.

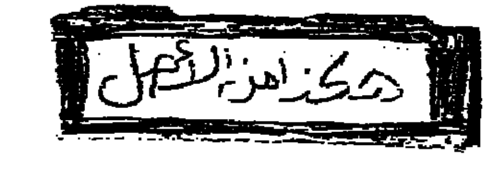
An official Jordanian source denied that either the Palestinian Authority or Israel had any role in the incarceration of Ghosheh. He said that the kingdom is "a sovereign state which does not act under foreign pressure."

During an interview with Reuters' television service on 6 September, Ghosheh had said that "each action has its reaction. When the pressure on the Palestinian people is very strong, then you will find that the reaction is very strong." Referring to the latest suicide bombings in Jerusalem in which 20 Israelis were killed, Ghosheh said that unless Palestinian prisoners in Israel were released "all signs are towards more struggle and more resistance."

Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister Ensour told the General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood that Ghosheh's statement revealed that he had known about the Jerusalem bombing in advance. "Mr Ghosheh is only responsible as a media spokesman for Hamas," said Zunybat.

The detention of the Hamas spokesman in Amman is indicative of the deteriorating relationship between King Hussein and the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood has been the king's staunch supporter for the last 40 years against many political enemies including Nasserists, Baathists, leftists and even Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**





(photo: AFP)

Bowing to 'Mother'

India and the entire world joined in mourning the death of Mother Teresa, whose life epitomised love in action. The funeral India accorded her was an unprecedented state send-off usually accorded Indian heads of state and national heroes. **Mariz Tadros** retraces the steps of her vocation

Never in the history of India was a dignitary of non-Indian origin accorded a state funeral until last Saturday when India paid homage to a tiny 87-year-old Albanian nun with full military honours. To the thousands of poor and unfortunate to whom she devoted almost half a century of care, compassion and dedication, she was simply known as "Mother".

"Today the Indian nation has bowed to Mother Teresa. She was the greatest personality in India and we are proud that she came to Calcutta and set up her work of charity there," said a spokesman for Inder Kumar Gujral, India's prime minister.

A day of mourning was announced, flags were lowered to half-mast nationwide and at the funeral her body was laid on the same gun carriage that was used for the funerals of Mahatma Ghandi, Indira Ghandi and India's first prime minister, Nehru.

Premier Gujral not only described Mother Teresa as a saint but acknowledged her struggle for equity on behalf of the Indian people as no less important than that of Ghandi: "In the first half of the century we had Ghandi to lead us in a mission against poverty, hunger, discrimination. In the latter half of the century, Mother Teresa showed us the path of service as the most beautiful form of worship. We can build a memorial for her if we pledge to remove poverty, hunger and human miseries and continue Mother's work," said the prime minister.

Representatives from 23 countries joined almost two million mourners in paying their respects to Mother Teresa. "Never before have so many world leaders come to Calcutta at the same time," said city mayor Prashanta Chatterjee. The list of VIPs at the funeral bears witness to his words. Attending were Hillary Clinton, the United States' First Lady, India's President K R Narayanan and Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, the Duchess of Kent, the President of Italy, the Queen of Spain, the Queen of Jordan and the President of Ghana, to name but a few.

Mother Teresa was born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopja in 1904. In 1929, at the age of 25, she arrived in Calcutta as a missionary nun with the Sisters of Loreto. The next twenty years she spent teaching history and geography until she got what she termed "a call within a call": "I was to leave the convent and help the poor while living among them." In a simple white and blue sari and leather sandals, Mother Teresa sought to offer "whole-hearted free service to the poorest of the poor".

She had no "poverty-alleviation strategy, nor the reports and research papers of development experts". She did not seek funds to set up headquarters in a glossy building. She was simply to live like one of the poor, not out of a masochistic or puritanical notion of self-mortification, but so that "when they complain about the food, we can say: 'We eat the same.' And if they say, 'It was so hot last night, we could not sleep.' We can reply, 'We also felt very hot.' Sometimes they only have one bucket of water. It is the same with us. The poor have to stand in line, we do too. We have been called to give until it hurts," she explained, nonetheless stressing the necessity of serving with joy. "A cheerful giver is a great giver," was her motto.

Working in Calcutta where the majority of the city's population of 14 million lives in abject poverty, Mother Teresa sought to assist the most marginalised by setting up mobile health clinics, soup kitchens, schools, homes for the orphans and the sick, homes for the dying and rehabilitation centres for lepers.

Some critics condemned her work as futile because she and the Missionaries of Charity concentrated on soothing the distressing symptoms of social injustice without confronting the dynamics that lie at the root of poverty and destitution. Yet how many lives were to be lost while the powers-that-be and the superpowers were engaged in finger-pointing? Others said the huge amount of money spent on charity was a waste. The poor were not encouraged to take responsibility for their lives nor were they made accountable for the free services they received. At a seminary in Bangalore, Mother Teresa responded to these accusations by saying: "There are many congregations who spoil the poor. It is good to have one organisation in the name of the poor to spoil the poor."

Under the leadership of Mother Teresa, the Missionaries of Charity in India opened their doors to people who were likely to be ignored, neglected or avoided by many NGOs who find that the great majority of the poorest cannot be "reformed" because they are too old, too sick or too disadvantaged to fit into the menu of "sustainable development programmes".

Mother Teresa's vision was to render back to each person his or her sense of worthiness and human dignity. "I prefer our Sisters to make mistakes through kindness than to work miracles through harshness and unkindness," she once said.

With that, she won the heart of the Indian nation, even though she was a stout Roman Catholic in a majority Hindu population. She repeatedly stressed that service should be irrespective of "caste, creed or nationality". Attending her funeral were religious leaders from many different religious denominations.

Yet to Mother Teresa the poorest of the poor were not just the citizens of the developing world, they were also "the unloved, the abandoned, the outcasts, all those who are a burden to human society, who have lost all hope and faith in life."

In 1971, Mother Teresa's order opened its first home in the United States for victims of AIDS; centres for drug addicts, the homeless and the hungry soon followed.

Mother Teresa rose to international fame in 1979 when she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize "for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress in the world, which also constitute a threat to peace". By 1992 her order was stationed in 450 sites in more than 90 countries.

Now that Mother Teresa has gone, many wonder whether her successor, Sister Nirmala, will be able to lead the order which revolved so much around Mother Teresa's personal qualities. Sister Nirmala, however, is confident about the future. "The Missionaries of Charity is dependent on divine providence. God will provide whatever we need," she said at a recent news conference.

Hearts and spades

Is poverty a necessary part of the human condition? It should not be. Yet it will be, as long as charity replaces social security benefits, argues **Gamal Nkrumah**

For almost half a century, Mother Teresa made her home in Calcutta, where she shared the lives of the poor whom she sought to help. By the time of her death last week, the order she had established counted some 4,000 nuns, who together run 517 centres around the world — orphanages, homes for the destitute, and AIDS hospices. She chose to be part of a worldwide institution, just as she chose poverty, carving out her own small niche within the gigantic edifice of the Roman Catholic Church. It was the church's backing that gave her the leverage she needed if her work was to have an impact that was not only personally, but also statistically significant.

A living saint for many Christians, Mother Teresa was no one culture's property. She was loved by many millions of people of different religions throughout the world for her steadfast devotion to the cause of the underdog. She was respected for the values that she represented. Her death coming less than a week after that of Diana, Princess of Wales, comparisons were inevitable between these two high-profile champions of the marginal and the dispossessed. Yet beyond any obvious contrasts in their lifestyles and public images, what is most striking about this coincidence is how both these figures demonstrate that charity and concern for others have now become emphatically a private industry, not a public service.

Mother Teresa, in the words of Pope John Paul, fought on behalf of those who had been "defeated by life, and [who through her works were made to] feel the tenderness of God." But the downtrodden did not always have to rely upon Albanian nuns and divorced princesses to defend their cause. Taking care of the poor was once the preserve of government departments and ministries. Inevitably, as formal support structures have fallen away, so the problems they helped to alleviate have deepened. Yet faced with a crisis of unprecedented dimensions, political initiatives and investments in human capital and institutional capabilities are rarer than ever before.

The elected representatives of countries around the world who have been badgering welfare recipients, slashing subsidies on basic foodstuffs and cutting social security benefits were falling over each other last week to pay tribute to Mother Teresa in Calcutta, just as the first ladies of many nations that export land mines to authoritarian regimes were only too happy to be photographed in black filing into Westminster Abbey.

In America, for instance, concerted attempts by Republicans to win the big battles over tax cuts have borne sour fruit. At a time when the American economy is booming, many low-income American families who fall below the tax threshold can no longer claim their full child benefit. New laws designed to drastically reduce benefits for disabled children and the elderly are also taking their toll on the poorest and most needy members of society. The war being waged against welfare recipients in the world's largest economy hits racial minorities, the disabled, diseased and dying hardest.

Yet despite this glaring disparity between politicians' words and their deeds, so far the deaths of Princess Diana and Mother Teresa have failed to provoke any serious international debate on the role charities are compelled to play in an age when cut-backs of all kinds are crippling the poor. One unsympathetic critic has even described the funerals of the two guardian angels of our age as "big circuses charged with plenty of unthinking hysteria."

Is charity a valid response to such hysteria, or merely a way of salving one's conscience? Charity today depends essentially on the goodwill of a limited number of rich individuals. It is no longer the government's business — *our* business as a society. Governments, both in the rich North and the poor South, are cutting back on welfare programmes. Budget cuts and lower taxes mean that it is the individual who decides where his or her small portion of money is going, if indeed it is going anywhere at all. We are empowered, the experts say, to make our own decisions. Yet for the critics, it is precisely this personal approach to charity that is so worrying.

"It is humiliating to have to accept charity", says Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, the internationally renowned Egyptian political analyst. "No one should be put in a position where he or she has to depend on the benevolence of others. Dependence on charity is not a dignified way to live. Civilised societies must not tolerate the existence of great disparities of income, where a substantial percentage of the population are utterly dependent on the goodwill of others." He added: "The state must play a greater role in ensuring that people live a dignified life. The role of the individual does not rule out a role for the state. No one questions the importance of the work done by individuals who dedicate their lives to charitable work and to alleviating the suffering of mankind."

Yet many refuse to see the problems that such individuals' power can cause, when cosy elites start running private charities and determining who lives and who dies. All this at a time when the numbers of the destitute and needy are higher than ever before: according to the World Bank's estimations, there are today about one billion people in the world who live well below the poverty line.

There is perhaps some superficial sense of justice in seeing the burden of charitable work fall especially on the super-rich among individuals and the wealthiest among nations. Few Third World countries will refuse charity when it is offered them. Yet economic deregulation, which is the root cause of so much social injustice, continues apace, even as the local elite is writing its thank you letters.

And who would disown a saint? Mother Teresa was buried on Saturday with the full honours of the state. "Indian politicians accorded her an honour usually reserved for presidents and serving prime ministers," Najma Heptulla, deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha, the Indian Parliament's upper house, told the *Weekly*. Yet they did not do so for nothing. As Heptulla, in Cairo for the international parliamentary conference, pointed out: "She served India well".

Among the predictable chorus of praise for the deceased who is not there to answer back, there have been one or two dissenting voices. Sunanda K Datta-Ray, a columnist in *The Telegraph*, claims that Mother Teresa's mission failed to make any substantial impact on Calcutta's grinding poverty. "Calcutta has little reason to be grateful," he wrote. "It was she who owed a tremendous debt to Calcutta. No other city in the world would tamely offer up its poor and its dying to be stepping stones in a relentless ascent to sainthood."

Once upon a time, no one would have dared question the political correctness of a living saint. Yet today, some are willing to declare openly that Mother Teresa's strategies for dealing with the poor's predicament flew in the face of social realities, and of common humanity. They point out that some 50,000 people have died in her order's "care". Then there was the well-publicised visit to Haiti under Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, where she received an award from one of our centuries' most brutal dictators, praising him — doubtless because of his Roman Catholicism — as a "great benefactor and one who champions and adores the poor." Indeed, her remarks in many contexts were widely regarded as naive, and often dangerously so.

Yet even without these blemishes, wasn't her reputation doomed from the beginning? There have always been those who have hearts and those who do the donkey work. A queen of hearts will always upstage a queen of spades. Diana, too, had her detractors. But there is an apparently universal obsession with princesses who lead fairy-tale lives.

"It is left to individuals like Mother Teresa and Princess Diana to gloss over the ugly social ills spewed out by the very successes of today's hard-hearted achievers," says Heikal. But the gloss is thicker when the individual in question shows that it is possible to help the poor without having to suffer with them, that compassion is compatible with wealth and glamour. Even the poor would like to think so. According to the BBC, half of the world's population watched Diana's funeral on television. "Half the world" doubtless includes many of its poorest people, even if they didn't own the television set themselves.

The ayes have it

BRITAIN is not hidebound by cumbersome tradition. Last week, the Scots voted overwhelmingly for the creation of a Scottish parliament with separate legislative powers from Westminster, ushering in a new era of devolution in Britain.

The scale of the yes vote for Scottish devolution made it more than likely that legislation introducing a Scottish parliament with powers to levy taxes would be pushed quickly through the House of Commons.

"What they have done, and what we have done, is we have shown that we can change the way we are governed — that we need not be afraid of change," the British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared soon after the referendum results.

The Scottish Nationalists expressed confidence that far from shoring up the Union between England and Scotland as Blair argued, the referendum had boosted the Scottish Nationalist long-term aim of Scottish independence.

The mythical Prince Gathelus was supposed to have brought back from Egypt the Old Testament's prophet Jacob's pillow in the form of the Stone of Scone. Over the centuries it remained one of the most revered of Scottish icons. A few months ago, the Scots retrieved it from England.

The first Scottish parliament was founded in 1244 and an independent Scottish parliament ended when the English and Scottish parliaments passed acts of union that formerly united England and Scotland as Great Britain or the United Kingdom.

The seat of the old Scottish Parliament was at Holly Rood Palace, now the official residence of Queen Elizabeth II in Scotland. And deliberations at Holly Rood promise to be as stormy as Northern Ireland's Stormont.



Holly Rood Palace, the old seat of the Scottish parliament

Victims of the veil

With fighting intensifying in central Afghanistan, the United Nations has pulled out of the country, leaving Afghan women to face an uncertain future, writes **Yehya Ghanem** from Kabul

Less than 2.5 per cent of Afghan women were literate at the time of the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979. Today, the figure is probably far lower. The vast majority of Afghanistan's estimated 20 million people are illiterate, especially the rural poor, who make up 90 per cent of the population.

While a few hundred Afghan women work in international humanitarian relief non-governmental organisations based in Kabul, most educated women work as teachers in girls' schools. But at the time of the Taliban takeover in Kabul, there were no more than 3,000 women employed in education.

Most Afghan women work in agriculture, constituting an essential element in the Afghan agricultural workforce. But with the Taliban usurpation of power, any change in the conditions of women agricultural workers is unlikely to happen. While urban and educated women are now forced to stay at home and give up their jobs, rural and illiterate women will continue working in the fields as labourers, especially with the men and teenage boys being recruited by the militias of the different Afghan warlords.

When the Taliban announced that women would lose their rights to education and employment under their Islamist rule, UNESCO decided to pull out of the country. This decision has given the Taliban free rein to enforce their despotic decrees and has denied the Afghan people the already meagre amount of aid granted by UNESCO — aid it sorely needs.

As a result of the war which has devastated Afghanistan over the past 20 years, the country's infrastructure is in shambles. Health services, in particular, are practically non-existent. Many hospitals were destroyed during the war and most of the qualified medical workers have sought refuge in neighbouring Pakistan or in the West. Water plants were also destroyed and the lack of available potable water has caused a marked increase in life-threatening epidemics like cholera. Infant mortality rates, a reliable indicator of the condition of a nation's health, are among the highest worldwide — with 150 deaths per 1000 births. Despite the World Health Organisation's (WHO) concerted efforts to improve health conditions, infant mortality rates are currently on the rise.

It is estimated that one million people died during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, while more than 150,000 were killed by the civil war that has been raging since 1989. Moreover, as a direct result of uncleared mine fields — 20 million mines remain scattered around the countryside — about one million people, many of them children, have become physically handicapped, and the numbers are growing.

The country's social fabric has also been destroyed by the war. More than one million women have been widowed and have no income or means to make a living. A whole generation of young people has come of age with no formal education and no training apart from that related to militia warfare. Consequently, unemployment and a sense of hopelessness have taken their toll, especially among the young, who have turned to, readily available, drugs. Afghanistan is one of the world's major producers of opium and heroin.

Commenting on the West's apparent indifference to the plight of the Afghan people, Sayed Khan, an international aid worker in Kabul, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*: "Conditions are appalling in Afghanistan. The people sacrificed a lot when they fought the battle for the West and won. But when the time came to pay up, the West began to withdraw and now they are using the Taliban hardline position on women as a pretext to pull out completely."

...September 1997

...olutionary ...ard leader ...n but not out

...Hussein Al-Qassim...

...Khaled Dawoud

Globalising Egypt's financial opportunities

To compete for foreign capital inflows, Egypt should augment its macroeconomic stability with a working knowledge of the rules of the global game, argues Adel El-Labban

One year ago. Egypt's credentials as an emerging market were under question. The key parameters and arguments for recognising Egypt as such a market at that time were declining single digit inflation, tight fiscal discipline, privatisation, a stable exchange parity, improving growth rates and a developing capital market.

Today, the macroeconomic credentials have been established, and the government's commitment to liberalise, reform and privatise has continued.

A new, very important dimension has also emerged. Popular understanding and support for the reform policies has multiplied. This is clearly evidenced by the surge in the number of Egyptian retail equity investors, and by the general mood of confidence and optimism in the country.

The new macroeconomic situation has effectively created an environment in which businesses can confidently invest to achieve medium-term earnings growth, and in which domestic institutions enjoy a window of opportunity to raise financial capital in the international markets.

Assuming a targeted minimum growth rate of 5 per cent, new investments of between $6-8 billion are needed. Domestic savings are expected to cover only about half the total required capital formation. Accordingly a savings/capital deficit of about $3–4 billion exists and must be annually financed from non-resident sources.

As the economy expands, larger projects are planned which require significant debt and equity foreign funds. Such funds are available to Egypt for two main reasons. First, Egypt is well perceived by the international financial and banking community as a seriously reforming economy with sound fundamentals. Second, the capital amounts required by Egypt are not significant relative to the total international sources available for mobilisation.

To what degree have such inflows materialised so far?

The results, over the past year, have been mixed.

Equity flows have been solid and increasing. The Commercial International Bank's path-breaking global depository receipts (GDR) issue, together with the Medinat Nasr Housing and Development Company's majority privatisation have ignited foreign interest in the domestic equity market.

Seven Egypt country funds have been raised, starting with the $46 million Egyptian Investment Company in July 1996, and concluding with the $130 million Nile Growth Company, managed by Alliance Capital and Commercial International Investment Company, in June 1997.

In addition to these pools of foreign equity capital, direct foreign participation in equity trading on the Cairo Stock Exchange has reached over 30 per cent of total trading volume in recent months.

Foreign interest in Egyptian shares has been directly commensurate with the pace and size of privatisation issues. The new government's more vigorous approach was immediately reflected in robust increases in market capitalisation and trading volumes. Foreign investors are currently awaiting the next phase of privatisation.

The market for equity issues for privately owned businesses was inaugurated by the Cairo Precision Industries last January. Foreign demand was strong for these deals as the underlying equities were associated, in most cases, with solid companies enjoying excellent growth prospects. This trend will continue and grow in significance as more private companies go public to expand their activities, and as the privatisation program gradually exhausts its portfolio.

Direct foreign equity investment flows to specific projects and companies have, however, been lower. Acquisition activities by a number of multinational companies such as Nestlé, Lever, Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, Babcock & Wilcox have dominated these flows.

In terms of debt flows, the pace of development has been slower. The limited domestic new issue business, and the absence of an actively traded secondary market for government securities, has affected foreign demand which is mostly directed to short-term currency arbitrage transactions.

The projected increase in Egypt's dependence on foreign fund inflows necessitates a clear understanding of the rules governing dealings with foreign mutual funds and banks.

First, unlike typical government or multilateral agency fund flows, these fund providers are driven by commercial market-determined considerations. Creditworthiness, in terms of ability to repay for debt exposure and attractive returns on a risk weighted basis for equity investments, are the primary determinants for any decision.

Second, all emerging and OECD countries are actively competing for these funds to finance their growth requirements. It is accordingly crucial that Egypt, at both the government and corporate levels, positions itself in the most favourable light to attract the required funds at the best possible terms on an ongoing basis.

Third, to effectively tap international financial markets, Egyptian users must vigorously adhere to international standards and requirements. These typically involve a level of transparency and disclosure significantly exceeding domestic market practices.

It also imposes a continuing obligation to manage the informational and other needs of a broad constituency of foreign lending banks and equity investors who regularly and professionally monitor their risk exposure and expected returns.

The attraction of foreign investors to any given market is affected by the relative risk-return calculations on their entire global portfolio, unlike domestic capital which has more limited asset allocation opportunities. Foreign demand is also influenced by volatility associated with completely exogenous and economically unrelated markets.

Clearly, there is no perfect risk hedge. By joining the international economy, Egypt has accepted the opportunities and the risks associated with such a shift. Prudent macroeconomic management, directed towards creating a private sector and export-oriented economy with a higher level of operating efficiency, is a major mitigant at the strategic level. It cannot, however, eliminate the impact of sharp inflows or outflows of foreign funds.

Stronger domestic banks, insurance companies, brokers and fund managers are needed to better cope with the international financial market players. This essentially involves more realistic levels of capitalisation and more effective regulatory controls.

The path forward is clear and irreversible. Egypt needs significant amounts of foreign funds to grow. The management of this process by the government and potential private users is crucial to ensure open access to these markets at advantageous terms. The current environment is favourable for funding growth needs. Given market volatility and shifts, windows of opportunity must be promptly exploited. The government, as the primary potential issuer of debt and equity transactions, can and should play a key coordinating role in organising access to the different financial markets.

In moving forward, the balance between the debt and equity flows should not be skewed. Solid links to both markets should be developed. Over the past three years, Egyptian equities have received disproportionate attention and have grown accordingly. This is a positive development, but has to be complemented with a strong debt-raising capability to service the entire needs of companies and banks, and to move the economy ahead.

The writer is managing director and board member of the Commercial International Bank and chairman of CIB's in- Commercial International Investment vestment arm, the Company. The above article is based on his presentation to last week's conference "Egypt: Tiger on the Nile"

Balancing interests and goals

Can Egypt's economy weather tough global competition and temperamental investors as it seeks to become another 'tiger'? Aziza Sami reports on last week's high profile conference

"Ring your broker, tell him to come and buy in Egypt" were the opening words of *Euromoney* Publication's Managing Director Richard Ensor, at the opening "Egypt:Tiger on the Nile" conference last week.

The event, attended by delegates from 29 countries, and sponsored for the second year by the Egyptian government, the international financial magazine *Euromoney* and a number of financial institutions, came as a high-powered marketing event for the sale of state-owned companies in the third tranche of Egypt's privatisation programme.

Sixty-four major hotels whose assets are evaluated at LE5-6 billion were put up for sale, with the government announcing that it would soon sell off an additional 65 companies in 1999. It has set the year 2000 as the deadline for the sale of all the public sector companies it has slated for privatisation.

The launching of Egyptian bonds on the international market before the end of this year was also announced.

To date, despite some delays in schedule, Egypt's privatisation programme has been regarded as one of the most successful aspects if its economic reform programme. The reform programme was launched in 1991 and implemented "with the least social cost, because our liberalisation programme is a home-grown one," said Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri.

Ganzouri unequivocally welcomed foreign and local investors to operate in Egypt — promising to overcome any impediments they might encounter in an environment not yet totally free of bureaucratic and legislative problems. He added that Egypt enjoyed political stability and that there would be no retracting of investment-friendly policies.

The government's reform efforts were commended by one investor as "most excellent". But foreign investor enthusiasm might also have caused embarrassment, by pushing a bit too much where the government prefers to go more slowly.

Euromoney's Ensor preempted the officials in attendance by announcing the long-expected but not-formally declared privatisation of two state-owned banks, "Banque du Caire, or maybe the Bank of Alexandria".

He also anticipated the possible privatisation of "who knows what next, maybe the Suez Canal" — oblivious of the fact that placing the Suez Canal in the hands of international investors would have negative political implications. Government officials at the conference, needless to say, were embarrassed.

Discrepancies were also brought to the fore in the shape of ambitious plans by the stock market's confident new head Sherif Raafat, to make the market "a leader in the region". The Egyptian capital market currently lags behind most of the other Arab stock exchanges, and requires extensive revamping and greater procedural efficiency.

The greatest challenge of all was resonant in the title of the conference itself — that of establishing the economy as a "tiger".

Egypt, as an emerging market, is still very small, and "needs more" in order to become the biggest in the region, said one financial expert.

Among the impediments to "tiger" status are a high unemployment rate, income disparities, and low savings and investment rates.

But the most poignant problem is the country's low export levels.

"If Egypt does not pursue this problem seriously" said one investor, "then its objectives will not be sustainable".



Other participants pointed out that continued liberalisation of Egypt's foreign trade system, in order to increase its share of exports in the global economy, is the basic recipe for success used by other countries such as Mexico, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia.

The government has already taken significant steps towards trade liberalisation by slashing tariffs from over 100 per cent to 50 per cent this year. But there is still the need to reduce tariffs on raw materials and to eliminate all non-tariff barriers.

Tripling current export levels stands high on the government's agenda, but Prime Minister El-Ganzouri explained that the delay in confronting this problem was due to the government's having "so far concentrated on monetary and financial reform, before tackling that of exports".

"We have to start from the very beginning here — with the producers, with the quality of production and competitiveness, with policies which minimise taxation and transportation problems etc.," he said.

But there are causes for optimism, stated El-Ganzouri, with the economy now poised for six per cent growth — up from 2 per cent in 1992.

This year in particular was seen as a benchmark year compared to the previous decade, with financial and monetary reforms initiated by the government finally paying off.

The country's gross domestic product increased by 5 per cent in 1997.

In 1996-97, the budget deficit decreased to 0.8 per cent of GDP with inflation, declining by 5 per cent during that period. A flexible and stable exchange rate has been maintained for almost five years and, in 1997, foreign direct investments reached $1.3 billion, compared to 300 million between 1985-95.

In 1997, the share of private sector activity rose noticeably, accounting for 64 per cent of all economic activity, compared to 50 per cent two years ago. The private sector's share in GDP currently accounts for 17 per cent.

However, El-Ganzouri admitted that intricate bureaucratic procedures and legislation — specifically labour and taxation laws — remain a major impediment to investors.

Several laws are currently awaiting discussion in parliament, namely, amendments to the capital market law, the commercial code, new companies law and anti-trust legislation. Investors also demand more flexibility in financial markets, and the need to accelerate settlements procedures, as well as insurance sector legislation.

The recently re-instituted capital market has been the main hub of investor activity, peaking in 1997 with the sale of privatised companies. But problems remain — foreign investors coming into the financial and securities market and then withdrawing quickly.

"With the size of what has been sold less than that which has been bought, investors are still needed to expand the market," said Michael Baring, global head of Financial Institutions at ING Barings. One serious problem cited by Baring is "information flows from Egyptian companies which remain worse than other companies in the region, as well as inefficient equity settlement."

"The capital stock market is not as developed in Egypt as in other countries. You need to develop an electronic market to improve settlements and volumes," he said.

Experts essentially agree that because the Egyptian economy has not set its foot fully on the global map, the effects of the fluctuations resulting from investors' often volatile sentiments have been mitigated.

"The Egyptian economy is immune from the turmoil of South East Asian economies because the number of foreigners owning shares here is still very low, although investors' interest can still be very volatile," said Baring. "Egypt is looked at as the centre of a region which, to a large extent, has not begun liberalisation yet," he said. "Despite the fact that net flows can be volatile and change their destination every year, flows to the Egyptian market are increasing."

The Egyptian economy also faces competition from a number of new markets in Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and from other newly-liberalised economies such as Russia and Kazakhstan.

"There is also the ever-constant competition from mature markets," said Baring, "where growth rates are very high, with strong competition for equities and bonds. Egypt is still very under-represented in capital bonds."

Egyptian investors, on the other hand, feel that it is the stock market — despite its defects — which has caught foreign investors' attention most. In terms of the economy at large, they say, measures need to be undertaken to ensure long-term investors and to persuade them to come in as primary, not secondary, investors to establish new ventures and projects and participate in development projects.

"The exuberance over Egypt is a rational one, based on achievements in the economy," said Mohamed El-Erian, deputy-director of the IMF's Middle Eastern Department. "The economy here has seen... a change which compares favourably with other emerging markets; and current economic strategies will further encourage investments."

"I do not think that the negative effects of the South East Asian economies' monetary turbulence will spill over to Egypt," said Erian.

But there are still the challenges of investments, which must be financed by stable domestic savings through the development of equities, banking and the capital market. "It is how the challenges are met which will decide if Egypt can be a 'tiger' and whether it will be regarded as such by investors," said Erian.

Political concerns underscore economic reforms

Egypt is working towards globalising its economy, but on its own political terms, writes Dina Ezzat

Egyptian officials last week, in the "Tiger on the Nile" conference, found a prime opportunity to quell foreign investor fears, stressing that globalising the country's economy figures high on the foreign policy agenda.

"We, in the Foreign Ministry, take these [economic] reforms very seriously, and it is our firm opinion that the Egyptian economy will have to link up with the global economy," Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told conference participants.

Egypt embarked on an ambitious structural adjustment and economic reform programme in 1991 aimed at privatising over 300 public sector companies and attracting increased foreign investments.

Last week's conference was part of the government's bid to inform foreign businessmen about investment opportunities in the country and the progress of the capital market. But equally important, it sought to clarify the relationship between Egypt's economic and political aspirations.

In his speech to participants, Moussa tackled the thorny issues of inter-regional economic cooperation and the impact the Arab-Israeli conflict may have on realising this goal. These are issues on which foreign businessmen have expressed concern when investing in the Middle East.

"This is an interesting aspect for many investors who think in terms of investing in the region as a whole, and not just in one country," said Magda Shahin, director of the Foreign Ministry's economic department.

"Egypt's gradual, yet progressive liberalisation policies, investor-friendly climate and minimal market fluctuations, have resulted in a good economic profile for the country," she said.

"But investment in Egypt has a regional perspective, as well," said Shahin.

While Moussa affirmed that inter-regional cooperation is worth pursuing and encouraging, he made it clear that any such cooperation "is linked to many elements — especially the Middle East peace process."

The current stalemate in the Arab-Israeli peace talks has hindered the opening of economic borders in the region, stated the foreign minister, arguing that improving economic relations hinges on a fair political settlement.

"The process of peace in the Middle East, and its success or failure, is a sine qua non for this regional economic cooperation," said Moussa.

This conditionality, however, has not stopped Egypt from pursuing a path for greater domestic economic prosperity.

Egyptian officials, as of late, have been busy building closer economic and political ties with most of the world's major economic blocs.

Discussions are under way with the European Union for the establishment of a free trade area around the Mediterranean by the year 2010.

Moussa admitted that the negotiations had been difficult, but sounded confident that "by the end of this year, or the beginning of the next, the agreement will be ready for signing by both parties."

Earlier initiatives have already begun to bear fruit. A joint Egypt-US agreement dubbed the Mubarak-Gore Initiative, signed in 1994, aimed at gradually substituting US aid to Egypt with direct investments in the country by US businessmen.

Moussa also spoke of other globalisation efforts, including the establishment of an Arab common market by the year 2007, an expansion into promising African markets and an involvement in spectrum-to-spectrum cooperation with the ASEAN group.

"Egypt has been working very hard within the framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) since its establishment in 1994," he added, citing another example of the country's drive to integrate into the global economy.

Next month, in the WTO's headquarters in Geneva, Egypt will send a high-ranking delegation to an international conference dealing with the interests and problems of less-developed countries.

"Egypt is taking a great interest in this conference, which will deal with the implications of the implementation of the WTO's policies [on the economies of these countries]," said the Foreign Ministry's Shahin.

Now busy putting together an Egypt file for the conference, Shahin asserted that while in Geneva, the delegation will have to focus on expanding Egypt's chances of increasing its role in the global market, but avoiding the pressures exercised from the developed countries who seek to accelerate the liberalisation track.

"This acceleration goes directly against Egypt's policy, which has been — and still is — based on gradual [liberalisation] rather than shock therapy," she said.

"We will stress this again in Geneva," said Shahin.

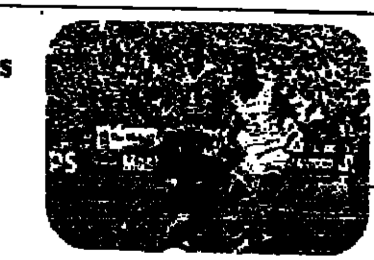
The delegation will also voice its concern over protectionist investment, trade and environmental agreements which favour developed countries at the expense of developing nations in the global economy.

"The basic message that Egypt is trying to get across... is that it is working on being part of the world economy," she stated. "But it will only do so in a manner best suited to its national interests."

In another speech, this one before the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting in Cairo last week, Moussa again tackled the political dimensions of economic globalisation.

Affirming Egypt's interest in linking up with the global economy, he underlined that this could only be conducted on a "fair and equitable basis" and by "establishing a mechanism for cooperation at the political, economic and social fronts."

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**



Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life




In 1907 Ismail Abaza took an Egyptian delegation of notables to London to present Egyptian grievances to the British authorities. The visit was a *dress rehearsal for the 1919 trip by Saad Zaghlul* and his delegation, the well-known *Wafd*, and, in a diplomatic sense, both were unsuccessful. But whereas history was kind to Zaghlul, turning his failure, almost incredibly, into a victory, it was not to Abaza. In 1907, there was no sympathy with the nation's self-appointed spokesmen, no flare of public emotion to match that which turned Zaghlul's frustration into a full-fledged revolt, only the ire of contemporaries and the neglect of historians. **Dr Yunan labib Rizk** tells Abaza's story, through the pages of *Al-Ahram*

Illustration by: Makram Henein

In his memoirs of the *summer* of 1907, the nationalist leader, Mohammed Farid writes, "The Abaza delegation has travelled to London. It was headed by Ismail Pasha Abaza and accompanying him were Mahmoud Bek Salem and Abdel-Latif Bek El-Sufani. The purpose of the delegation was to conclude an agreement with the British whereby the British would grant us a pared-down constitution in exchange for us stifling the nationalist movement and implicitly recognising the British occupation. In July of that year, the Turks had won their constitution and I gave a speech in Alexandria on 14 August in which I attacked the Abaza delegation."

It is interesting to note the vehemence of this reaction — epitomising the opinion of the Nationalist Party — against the first Egyptian delegation to travel to the British capital to voice national grievances and *demands. It is all* the more noteworthy because the Abaza visit was in effect a "rehearsal" for the famous Wafd delegation headed by Saad Zaghlul, which travelled to Europe in the wake of World War I and ultimately sparked the 1919 Revolution. The first delegation's mission was so overshadowed by Saad Zaghlul's that some historians sympathised with the position of the Nationalist Party while others simply ignored the Abaza delegation *in their* account of the nationalist movement before the war.

Al-Ahram, on the other hand, provides us with an entirely different perspective on what it termed "the delegation of notables." We learn of its formation from a report on a speech by Ismail Abaza to a large gathering, including leading representatives of the press. Abaza said, "The idea that a group of notables should travel to London did not come into being this month or even this year. The idea, in fact, is quite old, although it has recently resurfaced, indeed, exactly a year ago this month, among the members of the Legislative Council. It has also been the subject of communications between members of the Legislative Council and some of their colleagues who had been abroad at the time."

According to Abaza, the aim of the delegation was "Firstly, to protest against the restraints the British government has placed on the Egyptian government with respect to responding to the demands of the Legislative Assembly. Secondly, to dispel the myths and fallacies with which the enemies of the Egyptian people at home and abroad have sought to discredit these just demands. Thirdly, to denounce the policy of the British government in our country, particularly as regards education, the preservation of the peace and the recruitment of some of their government officials here at a time when well-qualified and willing Egyptians are deprived of the opportunity to fill these posts. In addition to the above, the delegation would discuss numerous deeds and actions which have aroused the indignation of all Egyptians."

In an oblique response to the criticisms levelled against him, especially by *Al-Liwa*, the mouthpiece of the Nationalist Party, Abaza said, "Sooner or later we will have to *open* the *door* to communications and visits between the British and Egyptians. The sooner we do so, the quicker will be our approach to the shores of happiness and independence. With this voyage of the delegation of notables, we will be taking the first step toward that aspiration." At the same time, Abaza scoffed at the suggestion that he was moved to this undertaking "out of a desire for fame and love of distinction." He added, "what harm does it cause the Egyptian nation if some of its sons are so motivated by the so-called allure of fame that they endeavour to serve their country at no cost whatsoever to the country *yet at every risk to themselves?*"

Abaza also shrugged off the suggestion that the delegation of notables was a ploy inspired by the khedive. That his notion gained currency was most likely due to the fact that *Al-Mu'ayyid* and *Al-Minbar*, the newspapers most supportive of the khedive were also the most jubilant at the forthcoming trip and the best informed of its progress. At a later juncture, Abaza felt compelled to *refute this association. In a letter to Al-Ahram* he wrote, "There is absolutely no truth to the notion that has become fixed in the minds of some that we kept certain newspapers informed of our news in London to the exclusion of others."

It was the opinion of *Al-Liwa* that the demands the Abaza delegation took with it to England were far more modest than what the Egyptian people wanted. *The misgivings of the Nationalist* Party were particularly acute in light of the new rapprochement between Eldon Gorst, the new high commissioner, and Abbas II, whose intentions regarding the Nationalist Party were now highly suspect. The Umma Party, being fundamentally opposed to the khedive, encouraged its mouthpiece, *Al-Garida*, to discredit Abaza's efforts.

In his memoirs, published in 1936, Ahmed Shafiq, a confidante of the khedive, provides an insider view of the relationship between the khedive and the Abaza *delegation. Shafiq wrote that* Abbas II was not adverse to the constitutional movement which had gained in momentum in Egypt since the constitutional coup in Turkey in 1907. The movement had gained supporters with the Legislative Council, including Abaza, who the khedive regarded as the person most capable of achieving this aim in a calm and reasoned manner and away from involvement in party politics. When Abbas heard of the delegation, he encouraged Abaza to present a memorandum to the British foreign secretary "explaining the circumstances in Egypt and demanding greater popular participation in government." Shafiq added, "*(the khedive) asked Sir Eldon Gorst to* use his good offices with the Foreign Office to arrange a meeting with the foreign minister and Gorst obliged in keeping with the policy of entente."

Al-Ahram welcomed the Abaza initiative in an even-handed manner. It published Abaza's viewpoint under the headline "A statement that must be made." It also published letters from readers opposing and supporting the del*egation's mission.*

The Abaza delegation left Cairo on 14 July and arrived in London on 20 July. Of the many meetings and receptions with members of the British parliament and government officials that took place during its 11-day stay, the most important was the meeting with Foreign Minister Sir Edward Grey, during which the delegation presented Sir Grey with the memorandum listing the Egyptian *demands. The first demand was for the* British government "to take the appropriate measures to grant the Egyptian nation a parliamentary government with specific powers." The memorandum acknowledged that these powers would not impinge on foreign policy, the foreign privileges provided by the capitulations system, or the functions of the Caisse de la Dette Publique. It did, however, stress that the new law for provincial councils, shortly to be promulgated, did not offer significant improvements to the representational s*ystems created under the law of 1883.*

The memorandum called for a complete reform of the Egyptian educational system, with particular emphasis on the higher institutions of learning. Arabic should be the medium of instruction in all public schools. More institutes of higher education should be established to train professors in all branches of instruction and the number of students sent on foreign study missions should be increased. Additionally, the government should promote industrial and occupational training and expand the number of schools for that purpose in all major cities and towns.

Another demand was for the British *government to intercede with major cap*itulatory powers in order to enable the mixed courts to exercise their functions. According to the law, the mixed courts were empowered to hear and rule on cases involving European litigants. However, it was commonplace at that time for cases involving Europeans to be deferred to consular courts. The latter were notorious for their bias toward their compatriots.

*Finally, the delegation asked the Brit*ish government to promote the appointment of "qualified and willing" Egyptians in higher administrative posts in the Egyptian government. The memorandum said, "Not only is it customary to appoint Englishmen to positions which Egyptians can easily fulfil, now it has become common to appoint Englishmen to positions which had, until recently, been occupied by highly com*petent and qualified Egyptians.*"

Abaza's account of the ensuing discussion with Sir Grey appeared in *Al-Ahram*'s 23 September edition. The discussion focused mainly on the need for parliamentary reform. Grey said that the proposed law for provincial councils was "appropriate to the needs of the Egyptian people at this phase." The delegation countered that since the new law was essentially the same as that promulgated by Lord Devron a quarter of a century earlier, "the only conclusion one can draw is that the British ad*ministration in Egypt has been poorly* run, since the new law is based on the assumption that the Egyptians have not taken a single step toward progress." Delegation members argued that parliamentary reform should have focused on expanding the powers of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. Grey argued that "Egyptians show no interest in general elections," citing as proof the low turnout in the elections held the previous year. Abaza countered that the foreign secretary's information was based on reports from a few cities and did not reflect the relatively good response to the elections throughout the country as a whole.

A second point of debate involved free education. Grey reiterated the customary argument of the occupation officials that the interests of justice demanded the abolition of free education since the cost of educating the rich should not be derived from the taxes paid by the populace as a whole, including the poor. The delegation, according to Abaza, succeeded in refuting Grey's argument. "We noticed that he *fell silent for a long time, jotting notes* down on paper and pausing intermittently to think."

At the end of the meeting, Grey told the delegation, "You are asking us to proceed too quickly and it seems to me that the government is moving too slowly on the road to reform. I have to admit that both these attitudes are not to my liking. Moderation is the key to success and, therefore, I promise you that I *will devote my utmost attention to your* demands and do my best to promote the interests of your country and the welfare of your people."

Upon its return to Egypt, the delegation was vilified by the nationalists. Typifying this reaction was Mahmoud Bek Anis, a leading figure at the Nationalist Party. In a letter to *Al-Ahram*, published on 29 September, Anis accused the delegation of pretending to act in the name of the khedive "who is loathe to the methods of a handful of reckless traitors who have taken *it* upon themselves to visit London and bring shame and ignominy upon the Egyptian people." The only honorable course the delegation could have taken, Anis added, would have been "to present the grievances of the Egyptian people to the people of Great Britain.

Had they done this instead of knocking on the doors of government officials, the Egyptian people would have lifted them on their shoulders upon their homecoming."

Al-Ahram's response, intended to refute the criticisms of the Nationalist Party as a whole, was to question whether "the proud and venerable" writer had actually read Abaza's reports. *If he had*, the newspaper said, he would have acknowledged certain fundamental facts. Firstly, it is the British who control Egypt. Orders are handed down from Foreign Office officials in London to the occupation authorities in Egypt. "Those officials do not hear the arguments of the Egyptian people as voiced in the Egyptian press because Egyptian newspapers rarely travel beyond Alexandria. The Egyptians had to bring the arguments to the British government face to face and that is precisely what Abaza and his colleagues did." As for bringing Egyptian grievances directly to the British public, *Al-Ahram* asked, "How can one speak to a nation of five *million* people if not though their elected representatives, their ministers and their newspapers?" The newspaper also objected to the assertion in the Nationalist Party press that the delegation's interview with Sir Edward Grey was an implicit recognition of the British occupation of Egypt. "The adversaries of the delegation," it wrote, "have so clung to this view like a dog to a bone to the degree that they have come to imagine that Abaza and his colleagues personally handed over to the British the title deeds to Egypt. But, by God, Egypt is not a farm of five, fifty, five hundred, or even five million people that can be bought or sold in an interview with the British foreign secretary concerning some of its domestic affairs."

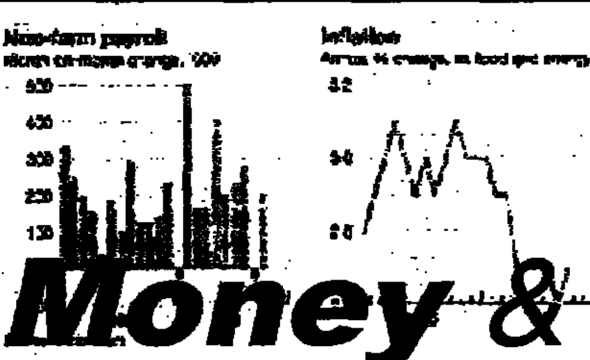


The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Saudi comes out on top

OFFICIAL statistics show that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is Egypt's biggest trading partner out of all countries of the Middle East during the first half of 1997. A recent report by the Bureau of Statistics indicates that Saudi managed to dominate the vast majority of imports to Egypt, with a share of LE646.7mn, or 61 per cent of the total volume.

Likewise, Saudi had a lion's share of Egyptian exports to Arab countries, receiving LE282.6mn, or 22.7 per cent of the total exports received from Arab countries. It is worth mentioning that Egyptian exports to Arab countries increased by 4.8 per cent during the first half of 1997, reaching LE867.2mn.



Russian-Egyptian commercial agreements

DR AHMED Guweili, minister of economy and supply, announced that a number of agreements, including one preventing double taxation, will be concluded during the con*vening of the Russian-Egyptian Higher Cooperative Council* which will start on 21 September. Other agreements involve investment protection and technical and scientific cooperation.

Additionally, memorandum of understandings are expected *to be passed regarding the establishment of a joint mar*keting company, a maritime transport company, and more.

6th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence to be held alongside ACITEX '98

ENG BAHA *El-Din Mohsen*, head of the exhibition and conference division of the Cairo International Conference Centre, said that the centre *offers outstanding* possibilities for holding various important conferences and exhibitions, such as the 6th *Artificial* Intelligence *Conference* and the 6th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition (ACITEX), both of which will be held from 18-21 *February* 1998.

The conference itself will convene in Hall 1 of the Press Centre, while the 4 smaller halls will serve as meeting rooms for exhibiting companies, and the cafeteria will serve as a relaxing place for participants where they can exchange ideas freely.

Dr Abada Sirhan, dean of the Faculty of Computer Science, added that papers for the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference will deal with various topics, including: expert systems, image processing, word processing, machine translation, sensory networks, natural languages, robotics, biological systems, telecommunications, intelligent systems in education, and other numerous applications using artificial intelligence, which aims at solving a wide span of problems faced by all nations.

Hall 1 of the Press Centre

ACITEX, on the other hand, will be held simultaneously with the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference, and *aims* at *bringing* local and international companies operating in the computer field. Each year witnesses new companies taking part alongside industry giants, a phenomena which reflects Egypt's continued progress in the field. Also participating in this important exhibition will be representatives from international computer exhibitions.

Every year, ACITEX serves as a forum for an exchange of ideas, and provides Egypt with an opportune occasion to become acquainted with the latest developments in the field of computers and information technology.

Mohamed Youssef Habib

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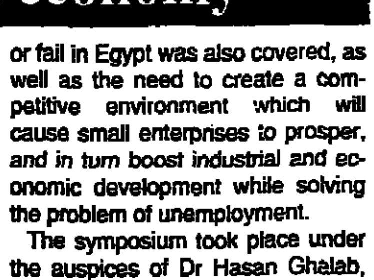
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The role of small enterprises in the Egyptian economy

BROADENING businessmen's awareness of the role and development of small enterprises was the subject of the first inter*national symposium conducted* by the Faculty of Commerce, Ain Shams University, for two days on 16 and 17 September. The symposium was held in cooperation with Växjö University in Sweden and the Social Development Fund.



Dr Iglal Hafez

The symposium discussed small enterprises in light of the Egyptian industrial strategy for the 21st century within the context of internal and external changes, in addition to the role of the university in clarifying the understanding of small enterprise, which requires the support of banks and businessmen. A discussion of the factors which cause projects to succeed or fail in Egypt was also covered, as well as the need to create a competitive environment which will cause small enterprises to prosper, *and in turn boost industrial and ec*onomic development while solving the problem of unemployment.

The symposium took place under the auspices of Dr Hasan Ghalab, *president of Ain Shams University*, was headed by Dr Reda Adl, dean of the Faculty of Commerce, and attended by Hussein El-Gamal, secretary-general of the Social Development Fund, and Dr Lars Anderson, dean of the School of Management at the University of Växjö, and Dr Musad Zein El-Din, acting president of the university, said Dr Iglal Hafez, head of the university's business division.



Al-Ahram Weekly

No room for hope

If initial pessimism about US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's Mideast tour was abated by her statements that Israel should hold off on settlement construction deemed provocative by Palestinians, Israel was quick to heighten it again.

With Albright's tracks still fresh in the sand following her departure from Israel, Jewish settlers decided too that the US secretary didn't know what she was talking about — and took over Palestinian homes in the totally Arab Jerusalem neighbourhood of Ras Al-Amud.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's response was equally predictable. Alleging that he had not been forewarned, he denounced the move but said it would be difficult to evict the settlers "within the law".

And so the law once again prevails in Israel and Netanyahu again reaffirms his commitment to peace.

But what if the situation were to develop into another major clash between Israelis and Palestinians? What if another suicide bombing were to go off in Jerusalem as a result of this incident? Would Netanyahu not quickly mount the stage and lambast Arafat for jeapordising Israeli security by not reigning in Hamas? The answer is obvious.

What is not so obvious, however, is the rationale behind Netanyahu's obtuse approach to peace. In the interests of securing his coalition, he is willing to play dumb and shrug as Jewish settlers occupy a neighbourhood incontestably Arab.

In the wake of Albright's visit, Israel's iron-fisted, blatantly unilateral approach to peace makes the process, and the efforts of all involved in it, look like a farce.

More willing to dole out blame than to shoulder responsibility, Netanyahu has again proven that it is the Jewish extremists who run his administration. Ironically, these are the same accusations he has levelled against Arafat.

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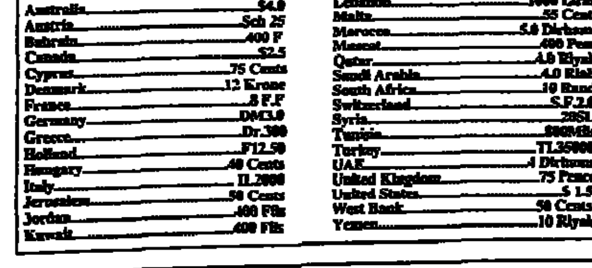
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Deciding on Doha

Whether or not the Arabs choose to boycott the next Middle East/North Africa economic summit hinges to a large extent on developments in the peace process, writes Ibrahim Nafie

Should Egypt attend the Fourth Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference (MENA IV), scheduled to be held in Doha in November? It is a complex and thorny question. The current deadlock in the peace process seems to support the logic of those who advocate a boycott; yet regional and international political and economic considerations make the prospect of a boycott unpalatable.

The Arab position from the outset has been that the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the negotiating process should be closely linked, and that progress in addressing the core issues of the Middle East conflict — primarily the Israeli occupation of Arab land — should meet with comparable progress in the field of regional cooperation. But since the arrival of the right-wing Likud Party to power in Israel, the bilateral track has ground to a halt.

This government has deviated from all accepted norms of civilised international relations. It has refused to abide by agreements ratified by the previous Israeli government and has consistently sought to undermine the principles of the peace process, which were unanimously accepted by all the participants in the Madrid conference. It has actively violated both the letter and spirit of peace by confiscating still more Palestinian land for Jewish settlers, and its belligerence has brought the region back to the boiling point it had reached before Madrid. Should the Arabs be expected to reward Israel for this behaviour by conceding to its demands for normalisation and economic cooperation?

The US administration has stated that it can be no keener for the peace process to succeed than the parties immediately involved. From the Arab perspective, the US, which helped lay the foundations for the agreements concluded so far, is retracting from its professed "impartiality". Once again it is demonstrating its exclusively pro-Israeli bias. It has actively assisted Israel in violating the accords which Washington signed in its capacity as "sponsor" of the peace process. It has backed the Likud government's demands to renegotiate over issues that had already been resolved. It parrots Israel's trumped-up allegations against the Palestinian Authority (PA) and its veto has blocked a UN Security Council resolution reflecting international condemnation of Israel's violations.

Because of this unstinting support for the extremist policies of the current government in Israel, the US has been instrumental in bringing the peace process to its current deadlock. In this perspective, it is only natural to wonder why we should accept the US call to attend MENA IV.

Egypt has consistently worked to facilitate communications between Israel and the Arab countries involved in the bilateral negotiations. Dr Osama El-Baz, President Mubarak's political advisor, has shuttled tirelessly between the various parties in order to hammer out some kind of compromise so that the negotiations can be resumed. It appears, however, that non-Arab parties are intent upon deliberately thwarting Egyptian efforts.

One is struck by the irony of this situation in the context of a conflict that has yet to witness the participation of an impartial individual or institution. Of all the parties involved, Egypt has been the most actively committed to reviving the peace process. In so doing, it has acted in a manner consistent with its pan-Arab interests and, simultaneously, with its perception that the stagnation of the peace process is dangerous.

What course should Egyptian diplomacy take with regard to MENA IV? Much depends on the developments in the bilateral negotiating atmosphere over the coming months. The actions of the US and Israel during this period will be crucial to Egypt's decision to go to Doha or not. If the US renews serious efforts to revive the bilateral negotiations, and if it pursues initiatives toward this end at high diplomatic levels, it will contribute to alleviating the pressure of the factors currently inducing the Arabs to boycott MENA IV.

It is not sufficient for the US to make a high-level diplomatic showing in Doha. Rather, it must demonstrate its willingness to bring the peace process back on track. Specifically, the US must declare unequivocally its commitment to the original principles of the peace process. It must also demonstrate that it is willing to listen to a variety of opinions — not just the Zionist lobby, which has such an exclusive hold over the American decision-making process as regards the Middle East. For its part, Israel must realise that it cannot persist in its current belligerence. It must take tangible steps to fulfil its commitments under current agreements, demonstrate its willingness to abide by the original principles of the peace process and prepare to resume negotiations with Syria at the point where they broke off.

Finally, it must be stressed that the current resistance to attending MENA IV does not stem from any opposition to the conference itself. Nor is this attitude directed at any specific country. Rather, it reflects Egypt's and the Arabs' commitment to a just, comprehensive and lasting peace. Only by eliminating the core causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict — the issues that must be hammered out in the bilateral negotiations — will it be possible to bring about true stability and cooperation.

The Diana phenomenon

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed, in London during the week which witnessed the death and funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales, comments on an extraordinary event

When the shocking news of Diana's death was announced early on the morning of Sunday 31 August, I happened to be in London where I remained until after her funeral the following Saturday. It was a singular experience, not only because of the unprecedented outpouring of genuine grief the event elicited at the national level, but also because it was the first time ever that what can best be described as class struggle was conducted with bouquets of flowers!

It is hard to explain why the British people identified so strongly with a woman who was, after all, merely the ex-wife of the heir to the throne. Tony Blair dubbed her "the people's princess". However, the Spencer family to which Diana belonged boasts a pedigree that is more ancient than that of Britain's ruling dynasty. In the now famous eulogy he delivered in Westminster Abbey, her brother Earl Spencer underlined the point — and addressed a clear rebuke to her former in-laws for divesting her of the title 'Her Royal Highness' after her divorce — when he said that Diana "needed no royal title to continue to generate her particular brand of magic".

Part of her appeal lay in such obvious assets as her beauty, youth, elegance, simplicity, her winning smile and luminous eyes. There was also the massive media exposure which made her a household name not only in Britain but throughout the global village. One of the most celebrated stars of the media age, she also became its most famous victim. There is no doubt that she thrived on all the media attention; in fact, she was said to be quite adept at manipulating the media to serve her own ends. That may well be, but the fact remains that following her divorce she was hounded by the paparazzi beyond endurance. With a candid shot of the Princess guaranteed to fetch a six-figure sum, the paparazzi, or stalkarazzi, as they were derisively referred to, pursued her relentlesslyy.

The news of her death was all the more shocking in that it came at a time speculation was rife over whether her highly publicised romance with Dodi Fayed would end in marriage.

Although I tend to shy away from conspiracy theories, there is no doubt that the coming together of Diana and Dodi was not entirely a coincidence. In a way, each represented an anti-establishment 'institution': Diana, because of her position as the divorced wife of the heir to the British throne and the mother of a future king, whose high-profile involvement in and patronage of many charities and causes greatly boosted her popularity; Dodi Fayed, in his capacity as the son of the Eygptian billionaire Mohamed El-Fayed, whose many applications for British citizenship have been turned down despite his vast holdings, which include Harrods in London, the Ritz in Paris, and the last home of the late Duke and Duchess of Windsor, also in Paris.

Already linked by a friendship and possible business association between their fathers, Diana and Dodi must have been drawn closer together by shared feelings of rejection by the establishment. Still, this in no way implies that they were the victims of a conspiracy to eliminate them, even if their eventual marriage would have been a source of embarrassment for the British ruling establishment.

In fact, to attribute the death of Diana to a conspiracy is to detract from the significance of the extraordinary emotion it provoked throughout Great Britain and the world at large. In a way, the massive outpouring of grief at her death implied a denunciation of the practices that had brought it about. Accusations were first levelled against the paparrazi, whose tireless pursuit of the princess inspired her brother to remark that of "all the ironies about Diana, perhaps the greatest is this: that a girl given the name of the ancient goddess of hunting was, in the end, the most hunted person of the modern age".

It was not long before the royal family itself, including the Queen, came under fire for the silence they initially maintained in the face of the tragedy, remaining secluded in Balmoral while the people mourned. One day before the funeral, the Queen bowed to public pressure and returned to Buckingham Palace. What struck me as I watched her televised walkabout among the mourners was the look of amazement on her face at the number of bouquets that had been placed before the gates of the palace in tribute to Diana.

In her address to the nation that afternoon, she paid homage to her former daughter-in-law and, the next day, waited at the gates of Buckingham Palace, together with all the members of her immediate family, to watch the funeral cortege. To get around the rigid protocol that would normally prevent the Queen from participating in the funeral of her son's divorcee, it was decided that the Spencers would be the chief mourners in the service at Westminster Abbey.

Diana's funeral brought out the best in the British people, who displayed remarkable self-restraint and dignity in the midst of their overwhelming grief. For many, she was a symbol of post-modern Britain — an inspiration for greater unity. Even the two warring factions in Northern Ireland saw eye to eye for the first time when it came to paying tribute to the Princess. Like Tony Blair, who had reportedly offered her the post of a roving ambassador, Diana embodied a new generation of Britons who believe that the tradition-bound legacy of the oldest monarchy in Europe acts as a constraint on Britain's ability to cope with the challenges of a new millennium.

It was Blair who insisted that the funeral should be a popular event in which the people were allowed to express their grief at her passing. Although she was descended from one of the noblest families in the land, Diana's espousal of the causes of marginalised groups such as the homeless, AIDS patients, lepers and land-mine victims earned her the love and admiration of the common people, for whom she came to stand for values not normally associated with Britain's notoriously class-conscious and hierarchial aristocracy.

That is not to say that Diana's death heralds the imminent demise of the monarchy. But what is certain is that it will no longer be royalty as we have known it to date. Diana may not have reigned, but she will be better remembered in history than many who have.

Death and Diana

By Naguib Mahfouz

My feelings for Diana, Princess of Wales, were always neutral. When I heard of her engagement to Prince Charles, I was pleased, as her photographs showed a pretty young girl. I never thought the news of her death would affect me so much, just as it affected the rest of the world.

I realise that one of the reasons for my feelings was that death himself had knocked at the door to say: "Here I am, when you least expected me... Death reminds us of its existence at all times, but it is usually in time of illness, or when we see a funeral procession. Not in this case. Here were two young people in the bloom of life and at the hour of their greatest happiness, the focus of the world's attention. Everyone was wondering when would they get married. Instead, they died in the wreck of their car.

If we were all so affected and so sad, it is because our sorrow for them was sorrow for ourselves. What we had seen was not a car accident, but death itself, which looked at us and said: "Can you take this, too, in your stride?

You have grown accustomed to death and walking behind a coffin, and know the suitable words to utter, but remember: death is much much more than that..."

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Peace and prejudice

Al-Ahali: "We have been inundated by press reports saying that Albright will be bringing with her definite ideas on how to revive the peace process. The press contradicts itself, for it has been saying all along that the US administration is clearly biased to Netanyahu. If so, how can we expect anything of a mediator who sides totally with one side? Albright prefers Netanyahu's 'peace for security' ideas to the Madrid conference's concept of 'land for peace.' Are the Arabs so desperate as to accept a 'waiting for Godot' situation?"
(Ismail Sabri Abdallah, 10 September)

Al-Mussawar: "The Cairo summit has ended with a clear vision of the right way to bring about a resumption of talks on all tracks, a vision which contradicts Netanyahu's attempts to bury the Oslo Accords and scrap previous commitments. The difference in view between the Cairo tripartite summit and Netanyahu is so huge that Albright will have to work hard to bridge the gap. What is needed is a clear US insight on how to revive the peace process."
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 12 September)

Akhbar El-Yom: "The statements made by Albright prior to her departure, upon her arrival and during her subsequent visit to Israel have not been encouraging. These statements must have pleased the Zionist lobby, but they led observers to predict, perhaps a bit too hastily, the failure of the visit. There is a clear Arab lack of confidence in US credibility as a power broker and we hope that Albright will be able to change this perception."
(Ibrahim Saeda, 13 September)

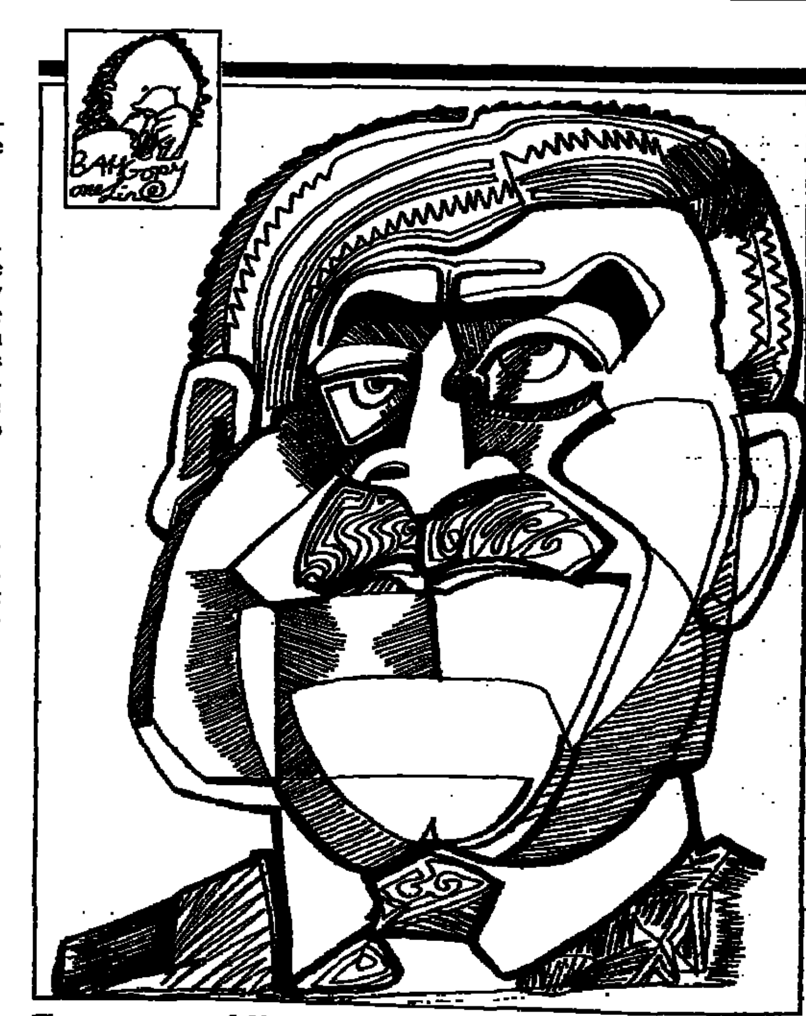
Al-Ahram Al-Arabi: "The [Mubarak-Hussein-Arafat] summit was timely. It underlined Arab commitment to peace and rejection of terrorism. It also put the Israeli government and the US secretary of state in a difficult position. Both are required by world public opinion to state clearly their positions on peace. The parties concerned had gone a long way towards peaceful coexistence until Netanyahu came to power and wasted no time in turning back the clock. The Israeli prime minister revived the climate of fear in the region. His policies of hegemony and occupation undermined peace talks with the Palestinians, the Syrians, and the Lebanese."
(Osama Saraya, 13 September)

Al-Wafd: "Our worst expectations have come true. Albright's visit to the region has failed because of the US total bias to Israel. The US bias to Israel is only too clear and it will usher a phase of violence in the region ... The Arabs are poised to reject the Doha summit. This summit is the real reason for Albright's tour. The US is neither interested in peace or Arab security ... Peace cannot be divided. What Israel and the US want is surrender and we are not willing to oblige."
(Editorial, 14 September)

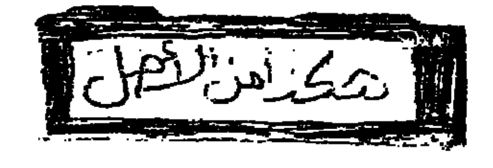
Al-Ahram: "The visit of that old woman, Albright, has no rhyme or reason to it, nor will it produce any results. What she announces in Washington is the same as what Netanyahu says in Jerusalem, or is it the other way round? We don't need more of US ideas. We've had enough. What we want is decisive and even-handed action. The US wants to see the region divided and begging for dollars and weapons. It wants to see the Arabs unable to start a new war with Israel."
(Anis Mansour, 14 September)

October: "Albright has come to speak of Israel's security and the Palestinian obligations. How about Palestinian security? She is yet to tell us what obligations she wants the Israeli government to honour ... The success or failure of the Albright mission does not depend on what she says — there is a lot of talk about peace and the US role but very little action. This is why we don't care what Albright says about the intentions of the US administration. What concerns us is what action she intends to take after this much-vaunted visit. We will wait see. Then, we will decide if we are optimistic or not and if the Albright mission was a success or failure."
(Ragab El-Banna, 14 September)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The massacres of Algeria are reflected in the face of its president, Amin Zeroual... I drew his eyes as question marks, while anxiety furrows his brow. His forehead is drawn tight here, in a frown fraught with tension. I pictured him attempting to stay calm as blood and flames rise all around him. At first sight, I thought, he would attempt to present a placid face to the world, as if everything was in place. But the questions remain, riddled with bullet-holes: how will he stop the bloodshed?



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Illustration: Gamil Shafiq

That handshake on the White House lawn: was it a breakthrough, or a bomb? *Al-Ahram Weekly* looks back on four years of hope and horror, and wonders: where do we go from here?



...then and now

Graham Usher describes the mood from Bethlehem

To commemorate the fourth anniversary of the Oslo Accords, a few hundred Palestinians staged a mock funeral at the Deheishah refugee camp in Bethlehem on 13 September. The deceased was an empty coffin bearing the wreath "Oslo". Although small, the demonstration enjoyed the support of all Palestinian factions, including Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement.

The scene was in stark contrast to December 1995, when Deheishah's 8,000 or so inhabitants celebrated the Israeli army's departure from Bethlehem by tearing down the 20-metre high wire fence that ensnared the camp during the seven years of the Palestinian Intifada. At the time, a banner was slung across the main Bethlehem-Hebron road that runs near the camp. It read "Deheishah shall not fall again".

Deheishah has not fallen, as recent protests by refugees against cutbacks in UNRWA services attest. But, four years into Oslo, the dominant mood in Bethlehem and throughout the Occupied Territories is one of utter pessimism. "For most Palestinians, the peace process is dead," says Fatah leader and Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member for Hebron, Mohamed Hourani. "To speak now of Oslo is meaningless," he added.

This is particularly so in Bethlehem. Since Oslo was signed, the city and its neighbouring villages have seen their lands confiscated by successive Israeli "pro-Oslo" and "anti-Oslo" governments to build by-pass roads for settlers and expand Jewish settlements, of which the ongoing construction of 2,456 housing units for the Har Homa settlement on Jebel Abu Ghneim next door to Bethlehem is only the most notorious example.

Following the Jerusalem suicide bombings of July and September, Bethlehem was also singled out for extended "internal closures" by the Israeli army, preventing all Palestinian movement in and out of the city. Israel justified the blockades on the grounds that explosives found at a Hamas bomb factory in early July in Beit Sahour, a Palestinian village near Bethlehem, may have been used for the Jerusalem blasts and that a Hamas military leader, Mohieddin El-Sharif, was at large in the city. It has yet to produce evidence for either claim and the closures have been quietly lifted.

Not that this is much succour to Bethlehem's 60,000 odd residents. As a result of the closures, unemployment soared, reaching 70 per cent in Daheishah. Health care has been crippled due to Palestinians being unable to reach hospitals in Jerusalem and the local economy has tipped into a free fall, with losses to the tourist sector alone estimated at $500,000 a day.

The cumulative impact of these punishments has produced a growing sentiment in Bethlehem that life was better under the occupation. "Before Oslo, and even in the early years of the Intifada, we could travel everywhere in Israel and move freely between the West Bank and Gaza Strip," says a Palestinian from Deheishah. But "the Oslo agreement has cantonised the Palestinian areas and we all need permits to go to Israel and even to Gaza. Is this peace?" he asked.

The answer is no. But neither is it war yet. Although protests flared in Bethlehem after Israel's decision to build Har Homa and during the closures, most were orchestrated and on a small scale, organised and led by Fatah students from Bethlehem University.

With Oslo collapsing all around them, most Palestinians, in Bethlehem and elsewhere, appear to have become preoccupied less with the national struggle than the baser struggle for economic and social survival. It is a political alienation reflected in Palestinian opinion surveys conducted over the last six months.

These opinion polls show that "strong support" for Oslo is at an all time low at the 10 per cent mark and that a growing but still minority trend in favour of suicide attacks represents 28 per cent of the respondents. But the most telling finding is the 44 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza who "no longer feel any affinity to either the PLO factions or the Islamist movement." As for the Palestinian Authority (PA), a colossal 47 per cent believe that corruption is "widespread" in the nascent administration.

This is some reversal from January 1996 when 79 per cent of all eligible Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza turned out to vote for the PLC and elected Yasser Arafat as their president with an 88 per cent majority.

For the PA leadership the Palestinian population's loss of support for the Oslo process is due simply to the "rejectionist" policies of Binyamin Netanyahu. But, in Deheishah, there are many who believe the rot set in after the Islamist suicide operations in March 1996 when, under inordinate Israeli and US pressure, Arafat adopted Israeli's security agenda as his own and authorised the arrest without charge of over 1,000 Palestinians in the vain hope of getting Shimon Peres and a Labour government re-elected.

"I worked for the Preventive Security Force for eight months," says one Fatah activist, who during the Intifada spent two years in Israeli prisons for her pains, "but I left. I realised that the PA was not a state, nor was Oslo the dream of independence we fought for. I need a job but I'm not going to become an employee of the Israeli army."

For another Fatah leader, who refused to be named, the root cause of the malaise is less Oslo than a deeper crisis in Palestinian and Arab politics. "The Palestinian leadership cannot declare Oslo dead because to do so would mean having to formulate a new strategy and new national programme," he says.

"We need to change the methods of our struggle if we are to defend our national rights." Is such a change of leadership and strategy anywhere on the horizon? "It will be a long process," he says.

Forever open-ended

Dina Ezzat asks four of the participants in the Oslo secret channel what they think of the DOP today

"The Declaration of Principles (DOP) was a prescription on how to reach an agreement," said Mona Juul, the Middle East coordinator in the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and one of the main facilitators of the deal. According to Juul, the interim agreements that followed the DOP were supposed to pave the road for the final status deal on the most sensitive issues, including the nature of the Palestinian entity and the status of Jerusalem.

Juul argues that the spirit of the Oslo agreements was derived from UN resolutions 242 and 338, but what mattered most in the initial stage was to get the two parties to mutually recognise each other. However, from the beginning, difficulties in the implementation and interpretation of crucial details kept proving that the critics of the agreement might have been right in arguing that the lines of Oslo were too vague to establish peace.

"If making Oslo not so open-ended had been at all possible we would have done it," said Joel Singer, one of the main Israeli negotiators for the DOP and accords. According to him, it was either this or nothing.

The reason it had to be this way, he argued, was that it "was not an agreement between two states like the one between Israel and Egypt where once you agree on the international borders you only have to work out the details of the implementation. This was an agreement between Israel as a state and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation."

The Palestinian side agrees that the beginning was not so successful but that it was a necessary step. "We hoped that we were making a beginning to end the hatred and then settle the problems," said Hasan Asfour, member of the Palestinian delegation to Oslo.

So what went wrong and why did the handshaking turn into an exchange of accusations?

"The main problem is that trust is missing. The Israelis started to bring back the concepts of hatred that Oslo aimed to erase," said Asfour. The Palestinians complain that the Israelis failed to honour the interim agreement and complete the redeployment schedule, even under the Rabin-Peres Labour government that signed the agreements. The Netanyahu government made things worse by starting building settlements in Arab East Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the Israelis complain that the Palestinians are not doing enough to combat anti-Israeli Islamist militant activists. According to Singer, "Arafat was supposed to fight the Hamas and Islamic Jihad movements but instead he decided to try and contain them."

While admitting that the "situation may deteriorate further" and that more political dispute and violence may follow, those who made Oslo still refuse to believe that their work failed. "The momentum behind Oslo is lost but Oslo is not dead," said Asfour.

The way ahead, they all agree, is to try and revive the implementation process. According to Ron Pundak, another member of the Israeli delegation to Oslo, and an assistant of former Israeli Minister Yossi Beilin, the peace forces on both sides have to give the necessary push and the political leaders need to make some concessions. He said that "for this to happen, the parties have to enter the final status talks because this is not the first crisis and will not be the last."

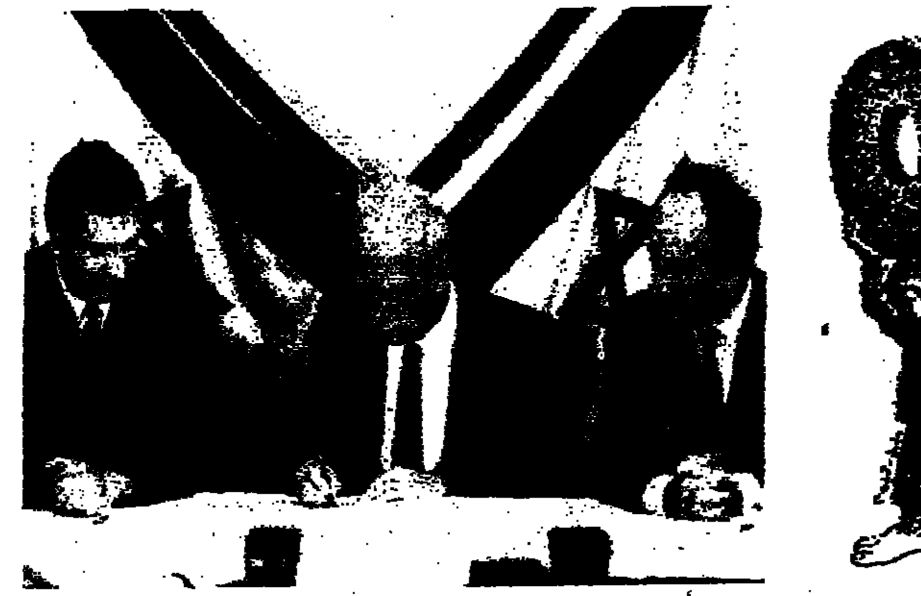
The Palestinians insist that they will not go to the final status negotiation table if Netanyahu does not halt the settlement activities which the Likud government is strongly opposed to doing.

Today, both the Palestinians and Israelis are expecting the other to make a move to put the process back on track. Some wait for either Netanyahu or Arafat to come round to the other's position, others hope for an Israeli national unity government that would pursue the road of Oslo, while people on the two sides are looking for the US and Egypt to exercise pressure on both countries.

Nobody however, not even the architects of the Oslo Accords, can tell what is going to happen next.

Al-Ahram Weekly
18 - 24 September 1997





Speeches and signatures: Gorbachev and Bush in Madrid; Arafat recognising the state of Israel, and Rabin recognising the PLO, in the presence of the Norwegian foreign minister;

'Oslo is moribund'

Hanan Ashrawi, Palestinian minister of education and former spokesperson for the Palestinian delegation to Madrid, sees little hope for Oslo, or peace of any kind, as long as Netanyahu remains in power in Israel

Is Oslo over?
In terms of implementation and honouring commitments, Oslo is moribund, but that does not mean that we are the ones responsible. Israel has destroyed most of the substance of Oslo and is attempting to keep up appearances. By doing that, it is trying to get out of its commitment and to run away from implementation in order to continue its own ideological attempts at expansion and domination.

Oslo is an instrument. It is an agreement that should govern the behaviour of both sides, so if one side totally reneges then the partnership for peace has dissolved. This does not apply to Oslo only; it also applies to the whole peace imperative in the region, which is facing destruction by this Israeli government.

The US secretary of state was expected to inject new life into the accord. What have the past four years left for her to salvage?
These four years have witnessed a real deterioration in conditions in Palestine. After an initial tentative implementation of part of the agreement, although there were violation, the assumption of government by the Likud was the first step in a drastic unraveling of the whole process and the implementation of the agreement.

This struck at the core of its credibility and of relations between both peoples. It is very clear that this government is intent on destroying the process, regressing to the language of intimidation, threat and domination.

Moreover, the Israeli government is using the Palestinian people as hostages to its own extremist policy, re-legitimising the language of ideology and extremism and attempting not only to renege on signed agreements but also to preempt final-status agreements by taking dangerous unilateral steps — particularly the settlements, in addition to the confiscation and annexation of Jerusalem.

Therefore we feel that, given the nature of the Israeli government, it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that we will come to any agreement with the Israeli government.

What did the Palestinians gain from Oslo?
In concrete terms, we gained at least the withdrawal of the Israeli troops from most of Gaza and from the cities of the West Bank. We gained the return of the leadership from exile.

But beyond that, we went back to the worst type of occupation by having the Israelis behave not only like occupiers but like a government that feels it can use the most extreme measures and violations as a means of political threat and blackmail.

Are these problems a result of Oslo or of Netanyahu's coming to power?
Well, within Oslo there were flaws, of course, and, although we knew that the Declaration of Principles was not perfect and provided openings for the Israelis to manipulate the process and use power politics, we felt that whatever we signed we had to adhere to.

But within Oslo there was the possibility of fragmentation of land, non-incremental gradualism, allowing Israel to put the Palestinian side on probation... A lot depended on the Israeli will to implement rather than on a guaranteed process, particularly in postponed issues like Jerusalem and settlements.

Netanyahu is calling for the final-status talks to be held now. How is this related to the context of Oslo?
Actually, Oslo called for permanent-status talks to begin in May 1996. By that time, it was expected that a three-year interim phase would have passed, which meant that realities would have changed.

Now we see that the interim phase agreement has not been implemented, that the realities on the ground have not changed. This means that permanent-status talks will start in a situation which is extremely detrimental to the Palestinians.

Meanwhile, Israel is trying to change the terms of reference to avoid the handover of any land. This is the danger: that Israel is trying to start the permanent-status talks by jumping together both the interim phase agreement and permanent-status issues and therefore give them equal values, so they will have us involved in technicalities and details.

We cannot in any way allow Israel to destroy the credibility of the process by canceling agreements; nor will we allow Israel to buy time by moving to permanent-status issues and getting us embroiled in endless negotiations.

But if Oslo is collapsing, what other options do the Palestinians have?
We do not think of Oslo as the end, or of the agreements or the negotiations as the objective; we feel that the objective should remain a just peace, a peace that would guarantee the rights of all people. If Israel wants to destroy the peace process, it should bear the consequences and it should not attempt to hold the Palestinians responsible.

I think that, as people who have signed these accords and who see that there are openings within Oslo to achieve permanent-status agreements, we are not going to renege on them, although we understand that the credibility of the process has been severely affected and that there is no confidence in the Israeli government and its intentions.

What are the main points which have not been fulfilled and how can we guarantee their implementation later?
There are many issues that have not been implemented from Oslo. We discussed issues of redeployment, safe passage, release of prisoners, and the airport. Israel has also committed over 30 violations: the dismantling of the civil administration, the failure to withdraw military rule, the permanent status issues...

There are endless violations that Israel has committed and agreements that have not been implemented. The time frame also played a crucial role in undermining confidence in Israel, because sovereign states honour their signatures and commitments, but Israel does not.

I think it would be unfair to hold the Palestinians responsible for rescuing the peace process single-handedly when Israel is working hard to destroy it.

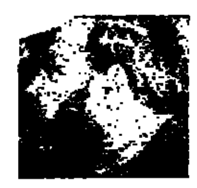
I think we need a concerted effort as well as a strong Palestinian will. The Israelis are quite adamant about protecting their own right to land, and the Palestinian leadership should stand firm in the face of Israel intimidation.

Besides, we have to work very closely within an Arab context and create a joint Arab strategy to safeguard those crucial issues on which peace will hinge, things like Jerusalem which is not just a Palestinian issue but an Arab issue too, and cannot be left to Israel.

We also feel there has to be a system of accountability and arbitration by the international community, and particularly by the US as the co-sponsor of the peace process. The US has undertaken the responsibility not only for launching the process but also for guaranteeing the way it is conducted.

Interviewed by ***Sherine Bahaa***

The zero-sum game



For Mahmoud Al-Zahar, Hamas spokesman in Gaza, the apparent demise of the Oslo Accords is confirmation of the Islamist movement's position

It has been four years since the Oslo agreement was signed. Where do you think the Palestinians stand now? It is now clear that Hamas made the right choice when it rejected the Oslo agreements. We rejected not peace, but a formula that only guarantees Israeli security.

In offering peace, Israel sought only to abort the Palestinian Intifada and to end the long years of struggle waged by the Palestinian groups including Hamas.

According to Israeli analyses, Oslo is dead. This is obvious. I believe that any other arrangements in the future will not be labelled peace projects but bilateral security deals.

Do you think this deterioration is due to the policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, or to a flaw in the agreement itself?
The main problem is that the Israelis themselves do not want peace. When Yitzhak Rabin talked about redeployment of Israeli troops — not peace — his popularity ratings dropped by 35 per cent. Knowing that he needed those votes in the elections, he halted redeployment, halted talks on the Syrian track, and increased Jewish settlements by 50 per cent. Rabin was also behind the deportation of more than 100 Hamas members to Marj Al-Zohour.

Shimon Peres, on the other hand, was behind the Grapes of Wrath operation in south Lebanon. He could have solved the Hebron problem before the elections, or even after, but he preferred to leave it to act as a time bomb.

There is no difference between the policies of Netanyahu and those of Rabin or Peres. Netanyahu is only a reflection of the general Israeli mood, which is against peace but for security.

Do you believe that US mediation and visits by senior US officials such as Madeleine Albright can revive peace in the Middle East?
I do not think that peace can exist while Jewish settlers are still stealing the Palestinians' lands and killing their children. Can you tell people not to hate if they saw their son killed or their father or brother crippled by Israeli bullets?

Israel is not willing to offer peace; nor are the Palestinians convinced that peace will be offered. The so-called peace agreements have led to increased Palestinian suffering.

What is the alternative to the Oslo agreement, then?
If we agree unanimously that the negotiations option has failed, must we bless it and accept that our hands remain tied?
When Britain invaded Egypt in 1882, some thought that the British would leave through negotiations. The result was that Egypt fell into debt. The Egyptians had to offer their blood to free their country. The Palestinian issue is no different. And there is no law against freeing one's land.

More importantly, Israel is obviously preparing itself to launch a war. Israel has established a committee which is currently discussing ways of minimising war losses. It seems it will start with Lebanon. It is destabilising the situation there in order to justify an attack, or at least to extract as many concessions from Lebanon as it can.

Israel prepares a war every 10 years to raise funds, to attract the sympathy of the US and to clear up internal problems.

Do you think the Arabs are prepared for such an eventuality?
The Arabs are divided into two groups: one group represented by Egypt and Syria which supports the Palestinians' cause; and a second which is unaware of the crucial nature of the issue and which is affected by Israel.

They speak about an economic summit in Doha while children are being killed in Sidon.

Do you believe that the setbacks to Oslo increased the popularity of Hamas?
Hamas has proved itself as an organised movement. It did not involve itself in war with the PA. It distanced itself from an authority overshadowed by corruption.

The negative performance of the PA and Hamas' correct predictions concerning the failure of the Oslo agreements have indeed given more credibility to Hamas and given the Palestinians cause to appreciate its attitude.

Interviewed by ***Rasha Saad***

'Crushed in its cradle'

Farouk Qaddoumi, Palestinian foreign minister and a bitter critic of the Oslo Accords, has refused to enter the territories under PA control and continues to operate from the Tunis offices of the PLO

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was meant to revitalise Oslo. How do you see the Accords, four years on?
Oslo faltered as a result of current Israeli policy and the government's refusal to adhere to the agreements. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu insists on ignoring not only these agreements, but the very basis of the process.

The peace process was built mainly on the land-for-peace formula, together with international legal recognition, which granted the Palestinian people their political rights. Although these principles should have been implemented, nothing has materialised: refugees are refused the right of return, the central administration is controlled by the Israelis and Palestinian political prisoners continue to languish in Israeli jails.

What did the Palestinians gain from Oslo?
Nothing, except the establishment of the PLO in the Territories. Some of the PNA's managerial responsibilities — not to mention sovereignty — are still being withheld pending Israel's full commitment.

Other aspects like control over passages, a halt to settlement building and the redeployment of Israeli troops are still uncertain.

Israel not only blocked Oslo but crushed it in its cradle.

Were these problems inherent in the formulation of the accords, or are they the outcome of Netanyahu's accession to power and his intransigence?
I trust neither the Zionist movement nor the Likud. Even the Labour Party has procrastinated since the beginning.

Israel was supposed to give back Gaza and Jericho, but withdrew from only parts of Gaza — after a five-month delay. If Israel makes security demands, the Israelis must honour their commitments. Otherwise, how can we say that Oslo is a success?

We need to reiterate that the Arab-Israeli conflict will continue as long as Israel refuses to abide by principles of international law. Instead, now they are asking for half of the West Bank.

Do you think the Palestinians have any options other than Oslo?
We agreed to a peaceful settlement, but the Palestinian people have the right to resist and the Arabs have to show solidarity. We proved to the world that the Zionists are the ones who do not want peace.

Albright failed to achieve anything positive as a result of Israel's intransigence. When we succeed in laying siege to the Israeli government, contradictions within Israeli society, which can be seen today, will become sharper.

The Israeli government is demanding that the Palestinian Authority clamp down on all those who oppose Oslo. Is such a request legal ?
The agreement does not allow for such demands. Netanyahu wants to create strife within Palestinian society, and he imposes conditions which were never mentioned in earlier deals.

Netanyahu has tried to change agreements ever since he was elected. He made the resumption of talks with the Palestinians conditional on changing the Hebron agreement.

When the two sides reached the Hebron Protocol, he refused to sign until former US Secretary of State Warren Christopher presented him with a letter of guarantees. According to this letter, Netanyahu was assured that the redeployment would be carried out according to his own timetable. It was also up to Netanyahu to hand over authority to the Palestinians when he so chose.

All these guarantees notwithstanding, Netanyahu did not order his forces to redeploy; on the contrary, he threw the Jahalin tribe off their land and started building more settlements. Netanyahu stated clearly that Oslo was a strategic mistake.

Netanyahu is calling for final-status negotiations to begin now. How must we see this with respect to Oslo?
According to James Baker, the architect of Oslo, there should be a transitional period of two years as a test for the intentions of both parties. During those two years, the Israeli authorities should have fulfilled their commitments.

The Palestinian National Authority has presented a memorandum listing 34 points which Israel failed to fulfil. So how can Israel, which failed to implement these 34 points in the four years that have elapsed since Oslo was signed, enter final-status negotiations? How long will it take them to deal with the central issues?

Interviewed by ***Sherine Bahaa***

Solidarity and other solutions



For Nayef Hawatmeh, secretary-general of the opposition Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Oslo's collapse is the result of the agreement's inherent fragility, but war is no option

What is your assessment of the Oslo Accords, four years on?
The Oslo Acoords are being bombarded by daily Israeli aggression in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem, where Palestinian lands are being swallowed by Israeli settlements.

The accords caused a split in the ranks of the Palestinian national movement and marginalised the institutions of the PLO.

Peace is now heading towards a new Oslo, tailored to fit the Netanyahu government's agenda, and supported by a biased US stance which favours Israeli expansionism.

What do you think is the reason for the crisis of implementation?
The fragile structure of the Oslo Accord is the reason for the instability now besetting it. Oslo did not offer the minimum level of peace and security. Under Oslo, unemployment reached 65 per cent in Gaza and 50 per cent in the West Bank. Free movement became more difficult than before. Israel also continues to exert full control over the checkpoints.

What about Netanyahu's role in the crisis?
The Oslo Accord did not fulfil the minimum demands of the Palestinians, but the Netanyahu government did its best to further undermine this accord and implement an even more unfavourable option.

But is there an alternative to the current peace process?
I do not think that war is an option, given the circumstances. The Palestinians should unite their ranks on the basis of the PLO programme, their right to self-determination and their right to establish an independent Palestinian state.

What roles should the Arabs and the international community be playing?
A unified Arab stance must reject any normalisation in relations and halt bilateral meetings until Israel abides by international law and withdraws from the Palestinian lands it currently occupies.

The Arabs should give financial, political, moral and economic backing. The Palestinians must feel that they are not alone if they are to withstand Israel's arrogance and aggressive policies.

The Arabs must also give full support to the Lebanese people in their struggle against the Israeli aggression in south Lebanon.

On the international level, why do we concede that the US is the only political reference? Why don't we encourage the international community to play an effective role in the peace process and put pressure on Israel? The US administration is not objective on this issue. It is the only country to have vetoed the UN resolutions condemning Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, even though the harsh measures Israel employs are opposed unanimously by the rest of the international community.

Interviewed by ***Atef Saqr***

'The best option on offer'



Faisal Al-Husseini, the senior Palestinian official responsible for the Jerusalem portfolio in the PA, is convinced that the Palestinians have no option but to press for Oslo's implementation

How do you assess the Oslo agreement after four years?
The Oslo agreement is now totally frozen. In order to be implemented, the Oslo agreement required at least two partners. The problem, from the outset, was that the Israeli side at the time (Rabin and Peres) was reluctant to apply it. As for the current Israeli partner, it rejects the agreement as a whole.

Do you think that, when Netanyahu calls for final-status talks immediately, he is declaring the death of the Oslo agreements?
If the Palestinian side were to accept that (which it will not), that would be the end, not only of Oslo but of peace in general.

Any Israeli attempt to bypass the transitional phase to reach final-status talks is an attempt to exempt Israel from its peace obligations.

Do you think that there is any alternative to going on with the obligations of the Oslo agreements?
If Oslo is really over, then Israel is the only winner. Oslo does not give us all our rights, but at least there is something which can give the Palestinians a foothold. Oslo is the best option on offer.

Can US mediation resolve the current impasse?
If the US is willing to mediate it can solve a lot of problems. Madeleine Albright's visit is a positive step, but this should not be the last word. The US role is not as powerful as anticipated and is not as powerful as it must be if peace is to prevail.

Is the crisis due to the accord itself?
Looking at Netanyahu's past, one can perceive that he has always been politically immature and arrogant. The Likud came to power on the strength of its decision to put an end to the peace process.

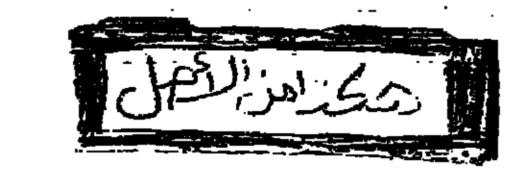
Any peace agreement can be applied, regardless of flaws in its terms, only if the political will is present. In the same way, a flawless agreement can die if there is no political will. The Oslo agreement is no exception to that rule.

Some believe that if the peace process with Israel collapses, the Arabs will be the only losers.
That is incorrect. Both sides will lose. If Israel is interested in playing a winner-winner game then it is welcome, but if it wants to play a loser-loser game then it will be obliged to bear the consequences.

The Palestinians are going through the calm that precedes the storm.

Do you think that all these setbacks to peace justify Hamas' military option in the eyes of the Palestinians?
This is one option that Israel will have to face if it refrains from peace.

Interviewed by ***Rasha Saad***










the fateful handshake on the White House lawn, with the avuncular blessing of a beaming President Clinton; in Cairo, 1995; in Washington, 1996

The stage was set

For Lutfi El-Kholi, outspoken advocate of the peace process and a member of the Egyptian delegation to Madrid, the fundamental feature of the Oslo Accords is that they established the Palestinian leadership on Palestinian land, and this cannot be turned back



"The Oslo agreements were a translation of the decision made by the Palestinian National Council back in 1974, that provided for the establishment of a national authority on every inch of Palestinian land liberated from the Israeli occupation, the first decision of its kind *since* the beginning of the Palestinian revolution in 1965.

"The Oslo agreements were the translation of a communiqué issued by representatives of the Intifada in Jerusalem, where, for the first time ever, Palestinians under occupation *suggested* a political settlement on the basis of two peoples and two states.

"The Oslo agreements were the translation of the wishes of the revolution in exile and the Intifada under occupation, both of which were basically calling for a political settlement.

"This line was expressed at a time when the Palestinian revolutionary leadership was three thousand miles away from Palestine and was being subjected to a financial and media blockade that denied it an organised presence in any of the front-line Arab states.

"This blockade was imposed by the US and the Israelis in collaboration with some Arab parties who refused to allow the Palestinians to establish themselves in the countries neighbouring Israel and who refused financial aid to the Palestinian leadership. At the time, the Soviet Union insisted that it would not sell the Palestinians weapons unless payment was made in US dollars.

"This line was also adopted at a time when Israeli hostility to the Intifada was especially ferocious. Yitzhak Rabin, who was implementing a systematic policy of breaking the bones of the children of the Intifada, was at the helm.

"It was back in the 1980s that secret negotiations were initiated between some Palestinians like Sari Nessibah and Faisal El-Husseini, and some Israelis, including members of Likud like Moshe Amiran. These meetings cost Amiran his job when Yitzhak Shamir learned about them. Today, Amiran occupies a prominent post in the army and opposes the policies of [Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin] Netanayahu.

"What is ironic is that Rabin — who later took the road to peace and signed the Oslo Accords — was opposed to these negotiations. So it is interesting to *observe how people change their* views.

"But the Palestinian revolution started the change. In its early days it was only concerned with the military aspect of the struggle for liberation. Critics always commented on its lack of political perception.

"Indeed, *one of those* who were trying to inject a political dimension into the perspective of the Palestinian revolution was Professor Edward Said. Said once tried to arrange a meeting between the two of us and Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat], Abu Jihad and Abu *Iyad to convince the Palestinian leaders* that the PLO should work on a political project and leave the militant operations to other organisations. The meeting was never arranged.

"When Said later declared his opposition to Oslo, I told him that Oslo is in fact the political project that he had wanted the PLO to adopt. But he said, in all honesty, that he had changed his mind and that he believed Oslo to be a retreat and a deviation from the path.

"I am not at all underestimating what Said has been doing for the Palestinian cause, but we need to place Oslo within its context. The Arabs were not being of great help. Proof of this is that, in the early days of the Intifada, the Arab League met in Tunis and decided to demonstrate its solidarity by granting $100 million to the Palestinians inside the Occupied Territories as a first instalment. To date, not a single dollar has reached the Palestinians.

"During that time, secret contacts and negotiations took place in several countries.

"While the general trend was to integrate the Palestinians in the Jordanian delegations — as was the case at the Madrid peace conference in 1991 — the Palestinians insisted on maintaining their autonomy.

"Indeed, no Palestinian, no Arab, and nobody in their right mind would have thought for a minute that the Palestinians would manage to implement the military option alone. Nor could anyone ignore the fact that every road *the Palestinians tried seemed to be turning* into an impasse.

"At the time, Israel decided that the PLO and Fatah, both led by Arafat, were the real enemies and had to be liquidated; they actually killed a good number of leaders of both the PLO and Fatah.

In their quest to undermine the two organisations, the Israelis tolerated the increasing activity of Hamas, which, they hoped, would replace the PLO.

"In short, the issue was becoming very complicated. But one fact was crystal clear: the Palestinians would only be represented by *Palestinians. And it was* within this context that efforts were accelerated, on the fringe of the Madrid peace process, to get the Palestinians and Israelis to talk to each other.

"At the time, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark argued that it was pointless for the Palestinian and Israeli leadership to try and conduct their meetings in public and that they had to hold them secretly to avoid any adverse reaction.

"The Palestinian leadership's decision to enter these talks was a very wise one. What did they have to lose? Those who criticise the Palestinians for having gone to Oslo are in fact conducting an exercise in theoretical and absurd politics.

"At any rate, before going to Oslo the Palestinians informed the Egyptian government as well as some sympathetic individuals throughout the Arab world. The Israelis notified Washington.

"To avoid any complications, one committee headed by Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) supervised the negotiations on both fronts: Madrid and Oslo.

"At the end of the day, I would say that as a result of Oslo the PLO started to function as an establishment from Palestinian land, and that this fact alone has altered the equation in favour of the Palestinians. This, I think, is better than having forced the PLO to negotiate all its rights when it was still in exile.

"I know that Oslo does not even cover the minimum Palestinian rights. That is why it was not easy for Arafat to accept it. But he knew that once the leadership *returned to their land, they* would not be easy to get rid of. That is what Netanyahu means when he refers to Oslo as a disaster. In fact, Oslo was a historic and courageous choice for which the stage was set.

"I know that the situation has *changed, although obviously Israel is* still the stronger side. And I know that there have been problems. But the settlement is not a smooth operation. It is a process that entails many fluctuations between gains and losses.

"The *Palestinians* are *there*, on their *land, in confrontation with the Israelis.* This confrontation has opened the door for the differences within the Israeli community to surface and for those opposed to the traditional Zionist scheme of Greater Israel to speak up.

"Today, about 35 per cent of Israelis are opposed to a Palestinian state, and 35 per cent support the idea — regardless of what they think about the borders and military status of this state.

"The next battle will be to try and work with the peace forces within Israel to get those 30 per cent on the side supporting the establishment of a Palestinian state. This is what I thought of doing when I joined a group of other Arabs and Israelis to work towards a peace alliance. It is not fair to say that these forces are incapable of doing anything to influence Netanyahu's attitude, because this is such a long term battle.

"Meanwhile, the non-implementation of Oslo should not be taken as a sign of the decay of the agreements; it is a mere symptom of the confrontation.

"Oslo is not dying. It will not die. Only if the PLO decides to abandon the land and go into exile once more will Oslo be dead; and I know that this will never happen."

Interviewed by ***Dina Ezzat***

Setting the record straight

Who killed Oslo? From breakthroughs to setbacks, fanfare to fundamentalism, handshakes and humiliations, **Abdel-Moneim Said** traces the stops and starts that have marked this phase of a crumbling process



Four years after the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, secretly negotiated in Oslo, was signed, it came under a barrage of sharp criticism. Initially celebrated as the beginning of a new phase for Israeli-Arab, and particularly Israeli-Palestinian, reconciliation, it became the potential trigger for war in the Middle East. Naturally, there was opposition to the Oslo Accords on all sides. In Israel, the right-wing Likud and Jewish fundamentalist forces hated Oslo because it laid the groundwork for a Palestinian state, deprived Israel of territories that these forces sought to occupy and annex, and because it made it possible to question and negotiate previously sacred issues: water, settlements, and above all Jerusalem. In the Arab world, and among the Palestinians, racists and fundamentalists found in the Oslo Accords nothing but the legitimisation of the Zionist state, the total surrender of large parts of Palestine and the postponement of the major issues: water, settlements, refugees and above all Jerusalem.

Opposition to Oslo, however, was restricted to a minority on both sides. Now, the opposition to the accords is in power in Israel. Its influence is growing among the Palestinians and Arabs as well. Further, in the United States, where the accords were signed, a large number of critics are calling for amendments. Former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* of 24 August that "the Oslo process, having exhausted its possibilities, needs to be redesigned."

When historians look back at the Oslo Accords, beginning with the fanfare of the Washington celebrations on 13 September 1993, *they will discover* what went wrong. On 7 December 1993, the date set for the beginning of the implementation passed without a step being taken on the ground. The prime minister of Israel at the time, Yitzhaq Rabin, then announced that dates and time tables were not sacred. As is customary in the story of the Arab-Israeli peace process, setbacks were followed by stagnation, of which opposition to the whole process made use in its bid to torpedo the prospects of peace. The PLO and the Israeli government were both keen on protecting their domestic fronts; an Israeli fanatic was able to massacre Palestinians praying at dawn during Ramadan.

The Hebron massacre was more than enough to reactivate the peace process. On 4 May 1994, the Cairo agreement for the implementation of the Oslo Accords was signed after difficult negotiations which continued on the stage of the Cairo International Conference Hall, where the ceremony was to take place. A breakthrough, albeit a sour one, was achieved. Yasser Arafat was to return to Gaza and Jericho. The Palestinians received part of a homeland and a political authority which is curtailed, not to say *handcuffed*, by Israel. The following months were to witness the usual Palestinian-Israeli haggling over the transfer of authority in the rest of the West Bank, Palestinian elections, redeployment of Israeli forces, and the amendment of the Palestinian Charter.

When leaders fail to live up to their responsibilities, the opposition takes the stage and uses it to its own ends — in this case, the destruction of the peace process. This is what Hamas was able to achieve through its attack on the bus in Tel Aviv avenging those killed in Hebron, but also imposing a *set-back on* the process toward Palestinian self-rule. When, Rabin, Peres, and Arafat received the Nobel awards at the end of 1994, the celebrations were mixed with hard feelings, frustration and disappointment.

The same sentiments prevailed throughout most of 1995. It seemed at times that "Gaza-Jericho first" would turn out to be Gaza-Jericho last. After many delays, however, Israel and the PLO reached an agreement in Taba and Washington and the *second stage of the* Oslo agreement began. Palestinian town after town welcomed Yasser Arafat in a groundswell of jubilation that culminated in the Palestinian elections. These appeared as the first firm step down the road to a long-awaited Palestinian state. For the first time, the people had given their stamp of approval to a process desperate for legitimisation. Even the Palestinian opposition headed by Hamas was willing to give the peace process the benefit of the doubt.

On the other side of the green line, the peace camp headed by Shimon Peres held a comfortable lead in the approach *to Israel's election on 29 May. The assassination* of Prime Minister Rabin by an Israeli fanatic ironically boosted Peres's position; the Likud was on the defensive, and Israeli-Syrian negotiations, after a long halt, were resumed. The Israeli-Jordanian peace seemed to be warming up, and in Amman an economic summit made the vision for a new Middle East seem real, particularly after Cairo decided to host the next economic gathering. All in all, the Middle East seemed on the threshold of an era full of promise. A document leaked to the press indicated that an Israeli-Palestinian understanding had been reached on final-status negotiations.

Then four suicide bombings claimed sixty lives and sparked a wave of hatred. Israelis filled the streets, chanting "death to the Arabs". The PNA was blamed and *pressured to crush Hamas' political and* military capabilities. Israeli soldiers swarmed into West Bank villages, punishing the families and neighbours of suicide bombers and suspected terrorists in a wave of collective punishment.

Yet it seemed that the peace process in the Middle East was not as fragile as many in the opposition on both sides had imagined. The peace process has sparked interest in a future far brighter than the past. For the first time, Palestinian demonstrators are denouncing the "terrorist tactics" of Hamas. They cannot surrender their hard-won freedom and independence to militants who have not been authorised to act by the sole legitimate Palestinian authority. The pro-peace camp in Israel also started to comprehend the potentially disastrous consequences of a new war.

Many regional and international forces also recognised that this was the time to act. The Sharm El-Sheikh summit was held as a signal that terrorism would not *win the day. The success of the summit* in the long term, it was believed, would depend on its ability to put theory into practice and avoid complacency.

Israel, however, perceived the message of Sharm El-Sheikh differently — not as the first step toward the creation *of a regional mechanism to fight for* peace and against terrorism, but rather as a new go-ahead for Israel to punish and terrorise civilians. The Palestinians were the first to bear the brunt of Israeli brutality. Palestinian territories were blockaded, closing off access not only *to Israel but also to Egypt and Jordan.* For weeks, the entire Palestinian population was literally starving.

Israel pressured the PNA and undermined its authority in the West Bank and Gaza by systematically hunting down and punishing the families of suspected Hamas and Jihad members. Israeli troops entered recently "liberated" towns and villages and methodically demolished Palestinian homes. These massive campaigns of collective punishment were applied in south Lebanon, too, where Israeli forces, through intensive shelling of towns and villages, forced a half a million Lebanese to leave their homes and take refuge in Beirut. Those who were unable to leave faced Israeli artillery. The massacre in Qana signalled to the world the horror that Israel could inflict on Arab civilians.

The story after this predicament is well known. The right-wing coalition that came to power in Israel paid lip service to Oslo but did its best to dismantle it through settlements and collective punishment. Hamas and Jihad suicide bombings were timed to prevent any progress in the implementation of Oslo through US, Egyptian, or European mediation.

Some of the blame for the failure of Oslo should be attributed to the deficiencies of the process itself. Another portion lies with the parties to the process, who showed insufficient diligence. All, one day, will have to make their apologies for having lost a great opportunity. They could have transformed the Middle East into an area of peace and tranquillity. Had they succeeded, *they would have shown that* we are capable of transcending human nature through the utilisation of human reason.

Dead, in text and in spirit

We have ceded to Israel the freedom to settle in return for illusions of hope, writes **Gamil Matar**

The fourth anniversary of the Oslo Accords has passed without ceremony, in spite of the overflowing optimism with which many anticipated this occasion. After all, the fact that the accords are now in their fourth year is in itself, according to some optimists, testimony to their success. This happy occasion was also to mark the completion of the second phase of Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories. The Oslo anniversary came and went, however, virtually without comment. If anything, it occasioned embarrassment all around, as tensions reached a new peak, unprecedented since Oslo — indeed, since Madrid, and even since the massacres of the Palestinians in the late '40s.

There is considerable cause for embarrassment. It is extremely difficult to absolve the Oslo Accords from responsibility for the deterioration of the situation in Palestine and the Middle East in general. Political propriety has prevented some Palestinian leaders from condemning Oslo, since they saw it before it was signed and approved its ratification; but the very failure to commemorate the accords renders them a monument to the inconsistencies that continue to determine the fate of a settlement to the Middle East conflict — the "peace process", as numerous commentators prefer to call it when discussing Israeli terrorism in southern Lebanon and Palestinian and Lebanese resistance to Israeli occupation.

There have been numerous signposts along the way. All seemed to coalesce during this week, which should have marked Oslo's fourth anniversary. It is impossible to enumerate the many developments that have encroached upon the "peace process", or whatever we might choose to call it. It will be sufficient to highlight and comment on a few.

It is sufficient, for example, to note that the withdrawal to which the Israeli government committed itself in accordance with Oslo has not taken place. The Palestinians contend that the Israelis have ignored more than thirty other obligations. However accurate this may be, the fact that the Israelis have not withdrawn their forces from the areas designated by the accords is by far the most significant and potentially dangerous failure. The continued Israeli occupation, along with the expansion of Israeli settlements are the most telling indications of Israeli intentions. At least they serve to confirm long-held suspicions and compound the frustration of the Palestinian people.

There is, however, a certain difference between the occupation and the settlements, at least in terms of the language of the peace process. The term occupation in juxtaposition to the notion of withdrawal is capable of reviving Palestinian hopes that a part, if only a small part, of their land will be liberated , bringing the end of the occupation *closer. Settlements, on the other hand,* imply Israeli construction on Palestinian land. This is the essence of life to Israel, at least in the aggressive Zionist perception. Indeed, according to such figures as Bar Elan, adviser to Netanyahu, any suggestion of halting settlement construction or dismantling existing settlements is the talk of terrorists bent on the destruction of the state of Israel and Israeli lives.

Herein lies in the error of those who approved of the Oslo Accords. "Error" is perhaps the kindest word to use in condemning those individuals who have ceded to Is*rael the freedom to settle in exchange for symbols calculated to inspire hope. There* was no regard for a preconceived plan to speed up and increase the scale of the settlement movement. This plan could be put into effect rapidly by diverting the attention of the Palestinians with other concerns and promises, which the Israelis were certain to do their utmost to impede.

Another consequence of Oslo and the practices of the Israeli government over the past four years was an increase in the membership and power of Islamic organ*isations such as Hamas and the Jihad. It is easy to point to numerous contributing* factors: the continued construction of Israeli settlements, the on-going occupation, the economic blockade. One of the more compelling factors is the prevalent feeling among Palestinians, and growing sectors of Arab public opinion, that we must avoid a repetition of the pitfalls experienced by many Arab parties that entered into peace negotiations with Israel. On virtually all tracks, the Arab political leaders, in response to an Israeli and American condition for the type of peace they want to impose, *closed the door to alternative forms of action. One of the alternatives is the re*course to the threat of violence, whether in legitimate form (by developing their armed forces and advanced weapons systems to vie with the Israeli military machine) or illegitimately (through armed resistance). In fact, certain sectors are exhibiting a growing tendency to call for the elimination of even the more peaceful alternatives such as postponing early normalisation with Israel and supporting the Arab boycott.

These sentiments are increasingly reflected in Palestinian behaviour with the mounting pressures and hardships of Israeli closure. Support for Hamas and the Islamic Jihad has become synonymous with resistance to Israeli aggression. It is no longer politically acceptable, for example, for Fatah supporters to demonstrate or throw stones at Israeli soldiers or blow themselves up in protest against the theft of their land, or in anger — and this is no less important — against Israel's daily exercises in humiliating the Arabs. The angry, the frustrated , the hungry, the re*bellious, the desperate have now decided to align themselves — morally at least —* with Hamas or the Islamic Jihad. Beyond the Palestinian-Israeli borders, too, there is a palpable growth of sympathy for these organisations. The reasons for this are the same that have caused Palestinian youth to prefer their religious affiliation over any other identity as the channel for expressing their anger and frustration.

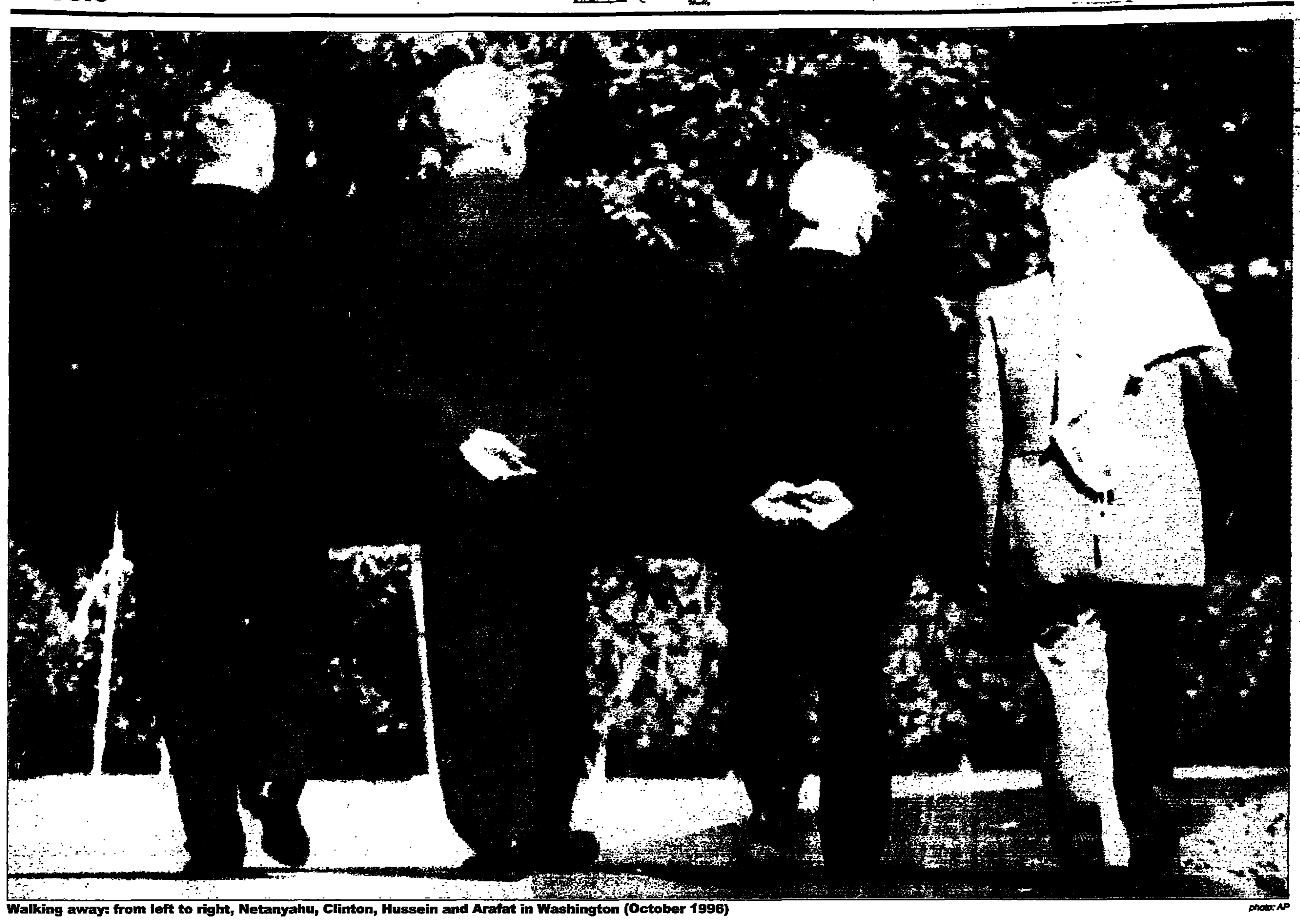
This relationship between religious affiliation and political developments has acquired a powerful force.

Connected with this phenomenon is one *of no less consequence: the fact that vi*olence can no longer be brought into the service of political leaders and their policies, as it could during the years of open conflict. Violence has now become a solution in its own right. When all other peaceful avenues reach a dead end, with regard to the settlements, the status of Jerusalem or the question of economic domination, violence offers the Palestinians only hope of a solution. The implication is clear and not without historical precedent under fascist, tyrannical and colonialist systems, Violence begins when the balance of power between rival sides in a negotiating system becomes so skewed that the weaker party has no alternative other than violence in order to redress that imbalance. The more distant the hope of realising a just solution and restoring usurped rights, the more willing people will be to support violence as a solution.

A third signpost of the consequence of the Oslo Accords has far-reaching implications. Like many others, I decided to wait until the end of US Secretary of State's Albright's visit until I *either confirmed or refuted my suspicions. After having fol*lowed this event and its immediate effect, I came to the conclusion that the visit confirmed and augmented the confusion in Arab public opinion as to whether the US, as a great world power, is hamstrung by Israel, or whether this global — indeed, imperial — power is in collusion with Israel against the Palestinians and the Arabs in general. Many readers will be quick to suggest that I have not come up with anything new, that the only difference between now and previously is one of degree. If the US is incapable of action, it now has its hands tied more firmly than ever; if the US is in collusion with Israel, it has now dispensed with the niceties and all pretense to the contrary. I can easily picture the groans of dismay when Albright likened Israel to the US: a country built by "immigrants who cherish freedom", and the incessant refrain that Israel's security must override all other considerations in the Middle East.

It may not be fitting, since Albright was our guest in the Arab world, *to suggest* that she intentionally insulted her Arab hosts in order to impress her Israeli friends, strangers in this region if not strangers to her. It may be more appropriate to assume that her statements were influenced by domestic US political considerations. I will not go so far as to believe that the US secretary of state is prejudiced against the Arabs and Muslims. I will, however, add my voice to those who assert that Albright's statements, and the failure of her visit, have confirmed what we suspected: that even the *United States has, for all practical purposes,* turned against the Oslo Accords, which it helped to foster and which it still claims to honour in text and spirit.

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**



Walking away: from left to right, Netanyahu, Clinton, Hussein and Arafat in Washington (October 1996) photo: AP

Strategies of hope

We must now wage a moral battle that far exceeds anything Oslo either foresaw or promised, argues Edward Said — or risk being the very compromised and much impoverished permanent losers

Certainly the list of negatives against Oslo is a long one, and as we reflect on it during this fourth anniversary of the signing ceremony in Washington, the horrendous balance sheet makes it almost impossible to understand why so many Arab and Western leaders keep referring to it with such enthusiasm. But in the wake of Benjamin Netanyahu's reign, his scorched earth policy has in fact delivered up a landscape of singular bleakness even when compared with Oslo's intended devastations.

Yet enough has been said about economic, social, and political deprivations for Palestinians during the past four years (all of them attributable to the Oslo peace process) without sufficient attention paid to the human factor, surely the most important. For in the age of globalized capital and the triumph if not of the actual but of the theoretical market model, most analysts tend to reproduce one of the ideological correlatives of this triumph which, I believe, is the conviction that there is no alternative to it. If you now think that only the IMF, the World Bank and market economics, which favour the wealthiest transnationals and countries, count in the world today, and that more equitable distribution and social justice are sentimentalised aspects of socialism's defeat, then you will also be condemned to think that there is no alternative but to compete in the market. Individual will and agency recede in importance, while the sheer power of market economics seems to dominate every individual everywhere. So it has been with Oslo, which has been a triumph for the powerful, in which Israel and the United States have convinced Palestinians and others that what has taken place since 1993 is not only the best, but the single remaining solution to our extremely grave problems. So the attitude today is "let us get Oslo back on track, since anything else is unthinkable."

At such a juncture it becomes evident that Oslo's greatest expense for Palestinians has been the loss of faith in what I called above the human factor. We need to remind ourselves that political struggles are always contests of will, in which one side attempts to persuade the other side to give up, to lose the will to resist and fight on. This is not a military, but a political and moral matter. I therefore think that the task for Palestinian intellectuals today is the reactivation of the will and, just as important, to revive belief in the possibility that what human beings do can make a difference. The tragedy of suicide missions is that they stem from hopelessness; they cannot be part of a programme for national revival since what they promote is negation for its own sake. The problem with the present impasse is not that Madeleine Albright and the US are unwilling to pressure Israel enough but that the leadership is caught up mainly in the effort to survive, not in the effort to mobilise as many Palestinians as possible to resist what Israel, in its arrogance and blind heedlessness, is trying to do to us as a people. This attempt at survival is understandable but insufficient as the core Palestinian strategy since the good of the many, the good of the nation is of far more significance than the well-being of a few. So what then are the imperatives?

Some of them are obvious and scarcely need insistence here. *Sumud* is crucial, as is the building of civil institutions by and for Palestinians, quite independently of what the Palestinian Authority may or may not have in mind. For we have a tendency to think only in literal terms, not sufficiently in symbolic and moral ones. The greatest victory of Zionism has been a sustained one for a whole century: to persuade Jews and others that "a return" to an empty land is the proper, indeed the only solution for the afflictions of genocide and anti-semitism. What has been totally lost in this project of course is the exorbitant price paid by Palestinians who, as invisible, silent, or mainly irrational and violent "lesser" beings have all along been considered sacrificable to the grand Zionist fulfilment. After spending many years living, studying and being active in the struggle for Palestinian rights I am more convinced than ever that we have totally neglected the effort — the human effort — required to demonstrate to the world the immorality of what was done to us: this, I now think, is the essential task facing us as a people now.

Unless we mobilise ourselves and our friends and, above all, our voices so that the Zionist project can systematically be shown for what it is and was, we can never expect any change in our status as an inferior and dominated people. Even as Arafat and his men try unsuccessfully to deal with Israel's actions they seem to have forgotten that no voice (or voices) speaks for the suffering of the Palestinians, no effort is made to record systematically the wrong we suffer, no energy is expended on trying to organise our various expatriate communities so that they can undertake the task of dramatising and finally defeating the legitimacy of the plan to take the whole of Palestine, every significant inch of our land, every aspect of our past as a people, every possibility of self-determination in the future. For at bottom our struggle with Zionism must be won first on the moral level, and then can be fought in negotiations from a position of moral strength, given that militarily and economically we will always be weaker than Israel and its supporters.

The importance of this was first borne out for me when I visited South Africa in May of 1991. Mandela had already been released, exiled leaders of the ANC had been repatriated, and the stage was set for the huge political transformation that was to ensue with democratic elections four years later and the victory of the "one person one vote" programme of the ANC. When I was there I visited the ANC's headquarters in downtown Johannesburg; a scant few weeks before the organisation was considered as terrorist, and no legitimacy at all attached to it. I was stunned by the complete reversal. Speaking to Walter Sisulu, who had been exiled for almost 30 years and was second only to Mandela in authority and prestige, I asked him how the transformation had been possible. What exactly did the ANC do to turn defeat into victory? "You must remember," he said, "that during the eighties we were beaten in South Africa; the organization was wrecked by the police, our bases in neighbouring countries were routinely attacked by the South African army, our leaders were in jail or in exile or killed. We then realised that our only hope was to concentrate on the international arena, and there to delegitimise apartheid. We organised in every major Western city; we initiated committees, we prodded the media, we held meetings and demonstrations, not once or twice, but thousands of times. We organised university campuses, and churches, and labour unions, and businesspeople, and professional groups." He paused for a moment and then said something that I shall never forget as long as I live. "Every victory that we registered in London, or Glasgow, or Iowa City, or Toulouse, or Berlin, or Stockholm gave the people at home a sense of hope, and renewed their determination not to give up the struggle. In time we morally isolated the South African regime and its policy of apartheid so that even though militarily we could not do much to hurt them, in the end they came to us, asking for negotiations. We never changed or retreated from our basic programme, our central demand: one person, one vote."

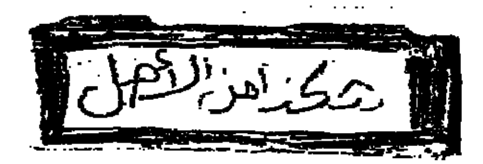
Let me add one footnote to this. On the basis of my South African experience I organised a seminar in London for every leading Palestinian activist-intellectual that I knew, including a few who have since become ministers in Arafat's government. I invited the ANC ambassador in England, whom I had met in Mandela's office and was on the same plane with me out of Johannesburg, to address one of our sessions, and he gladly accepted. The idea was to impress on everyone, a mere matter of weeks before Madrid, that we should all tirelessly focus on the same facts about what had happened to us as a people, and should not get deflected into discussions about policy and grand negotiating tactics with the Israelis and the US and so lose sight of the political-moral goal of isolating the Israeli occupation and delegitimising it all over, as the result of a carefully organised mass movement in Europe, North America, the Arab world, and elsewhere. There was some resistance to listening to the ANC representative talk about his experiences; "South Africa is a different case," said a distinguished young Palestinian political scientist who thought we should be addressing Oxford or Harvard experts behind closed doors, not wasting our time on trying to create a grass roots movement of support for Palestinian human rights. I remember saying that we should always make it a point to be as concrete as possible — to talk about daily life under Israeli occupation, to talk about the humiliations of check points, of how our houses were blown up, and how our trees were uprooted — and not to talk to audiences as if we were negotiating theoretical issues. All in all I and my co-organisers of the seminar felt that we had made some progress. But the moment Madrid gave us an opportunity to appear in public we all started to speak like James Baker, forgetting that our status had more weight as representatives of a moral cause than as members of a diplomatic delegation. And of course the goal changed, so much so that in the Oslo negotiations and in the period after them we forgot not just our values but our own history.

I am convinced that we have no recourse now but to return to the discourse of the oppressed and use what Netanyahu is now doing to us as an initiative to put his policies in direct contact with the history of Zionist policies towards the Palestinians. After all he speaks in a straight line of descent from what every major Zionist theoretician has declared: that Jews have a superior right to Palestine despite the presence and existence of Palestinians. We must not only contest what is now being done to us, but also take our moral presence directly into the Israeli and Western, and even the Arab, consciousness. Zionism's original sin was to have dispossessed us, and what the Likud now does is what Labour had done before it, to continue the original dispossession under the guise of "peace" and "security." But this confrontation cannot be undertaken by individuals acting alone: it must be a job of organising and then implementing such a plan by the world-wide community of Palestinians. Arafat and his coterie have never understood this. They have always supposed that if they could get the attention of the president or secretary of state, or even of various prominent Jewish leaders in the United States, these influential people could be persuaded to do "something" for the Palestinians. I have always refused the premise that what we demand as a people ought to be conceded to us charitably, or in bits and pieces as a reward for our good behaviour. This is to diminish ourselves and what we stand for, since our position as a dispossessed people is morally unassailable. So it is therefore evident that each Palestinian community must organise itself so as to intervene in the public discussion now taking place on a world-wide scale about the conflict between us and those Israelis who support Netanyahu. But even that supposed majority of Israelis who say in polls that they are for peace have to be recalled to our reality, which is that of a people whose land was taken so that Israel could be built.

I am not at all saying that we should advocate the destruction of Israel, nor the dispossession of Israelis. Our movement gains its moral stature by its humane dimensions, its sincere willingness for coexistence, its firm belief in respecting the rights of others. What I am talking about is a new peace initiative designed over a long period of time to bring parity between us and the Israelis, who so far overpower us now as to make the moral dimension our only field of struggle. We must show Israel and its supporters that only a full acknowledgement by them of what was done to us can bring peace and reconciliation. To do this, therefore, we must have a policy of concrete detail, not one of broad, abstract statements that are not fully engaged in the struggle for opinion. It would be good, for example, to remind readers of journalistic articles that various sites in Israel were once Arab from which their original inhabitants were expelled. Thus in a recent profile of Anatol Scharansky by David Remnick in *The New Yorker* magazine Remnick mentions casually that the Soviet activist now resides in Qatamon, "an old quarter in West Jerusalem," without saying to his readers that it was an Arab quarter emptied of its inhabitants by force in the early months of 1948. Similarly when Albright cites her appreciation of "Palestinian suffering" we should be challenging her to do the arithmetic in public: how many Palestinians need to suffer and for how long and in what way for Israel's security anxieties to be allayed? Or yet again, in a recent issue of the *New York Times* Sunday magazine which contained a profile of Jibril Rajub by Jonathan Goldberg, who admits to having served in the Israeli army, we should be publicly challenging the appropriateness of an ex-Israeli soldier to write fairly of a Palestinian activist. The examples can be multiplied infinitely, but all of them rest on one assumption: that, as a people, we carry a full-scale moral argument that has never been fully heard or taken into account. What we ask for is acknowledgement, not destruction, equality, not subordination. I think also that we must always be very clear in our understanding of Jewish suffering and in making it apparent that what binds us together is a common history of persecution, which must be shown not to be the exclusive possession of the Jewish people.

Only by raising our voices in concert and registering moral victories can we then further encourage and empower our compatriots in Palestine or in the various refugee camps in the Arab world. We should be voices of courage and honesty both of them credibly connected to an ongoing effort to gain real self-determination for the Palestinian people. I know that skeptics will say that words are not as effective as deeds, and that only the experience of facing Israeli settlers on the land is what counts. But that, I think, is sadly to miss the moral dimension that must be expounded on wherever there are people to listen and unjust power to engage with directly. The greatest victories of Zionism were not simply that they had better armies than we did, but that they had organised opinion to accept and even support the idea that settling Palestine with incoming Jews was a morally positive idea.

We must now undertake the same laborious task, first of delegitimising Israel's military and colonial policy in Gaza and the West Bank, then of giving our quest for self-determination the authority it still lacks. We should be prepared to ask academics and professionals to boycott visits to Israel unless they make an effort to visit and support Palestinian universities and institutes; we should also be mounting a campaign to ensure that tourists to Israel who think of it only as an "interesting place" should begin to see it as a land where two peoples must live together peacefully and equally but now do not. In other words, what we now have before us is a commitment that far exceeds anything that Oslo either foresaw or promised, and if we do not take up the challenge I fear that we will be the very compromised and much impoverished permanent losers.





Close up

Salama A. Salama

Unless we comply

The aim of Madeleine Albright's visit to this region seemed to change mid-course. While her original aim may have been to save the peace process, it was soon transformed into a mere effort to obtain Arab acceptance and backing for America's role in the Middle East. The result was that Mrs Albright came away with a maximum of prestige and praise, whereas the Arabs did not achieve a single one of the five points they had agreed upon during their tripartite summit meeting before her arrival. As for Netanyahu, he was able to obtain a definite commitment that Israeli security was paramount and that the remaining issues could be postponed indefinitely.

As usual, the Arabs were full of praise and boundless approval for the "promising start" to the Albright mission, the "spirit of optimism" she infused in every capital she visited, and the light she revealed at the end of the tunnel, although nobody else could see it. This, of course, comes at a time when Netanyahu not only openly refuses to stop carrying out "unilateral measures" (the term used by Albright with regard to the creation of new settlements, in order to avoid ruffling Netanyahu), but also steps up his military operations in southern Lebanon, encourages settlers to create more settlements in East Jerusalem, and affirms his intention to continue building in Jebel Abu Ghneim.

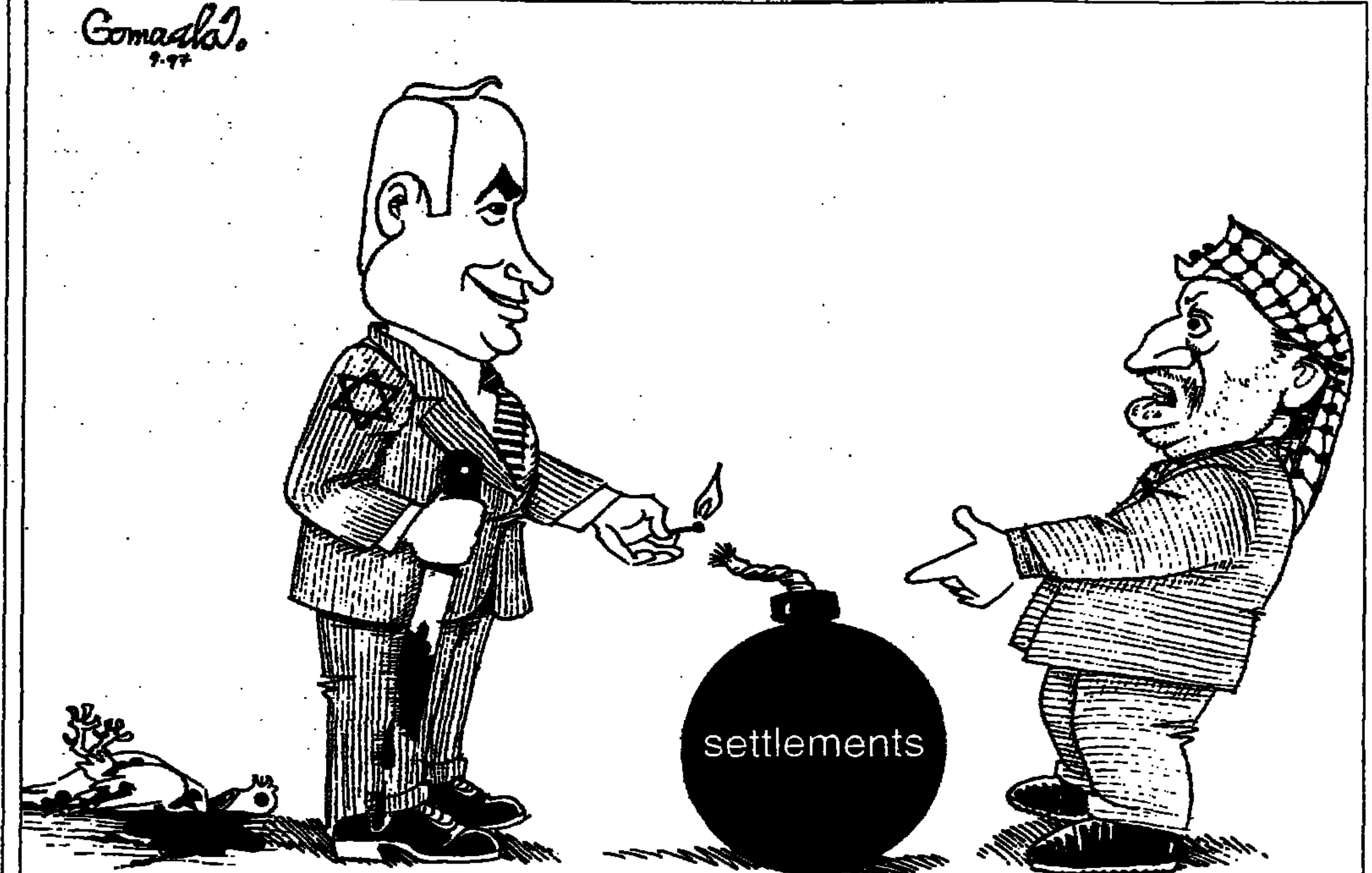
During her visit to the region, Albright did not focus on the essential issues that blocked the peace negotiations with the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon, or the collapse of the principles on which they had been based. Instead, she concentrated on censuring the Palestinian Authority and urging it to crush and imprison members of Hamas, who represent 30 per cent of the Palestinian population. She repeated her nonsensical remarks that there could be no comparison between bombs and bulldozers — ignoring the fact that Israeli terrorism consists precisely of pulling down houses, setting up blockades, expropriating Palestinian land, and imprisoning thousands of Palestinians on the mere suspicion that they might be a danger to the security of Israeli occupation.

In her televised interview in Egypt, Albright denied that she had discussed with Netanyahu the freezing of settlement building in the West Bank. She focused on building a climate of trust — but without any clear statement on Washington's position regarding settlements, nor any hint at Washington's policy on Israel's refusal to withdraw in accordance with the agreement. Nor did she comment on the US Congress's call to sever relations with the PA and cut off financial aid.

So nobody can know for sure what Albright asked the Israelis to do in order to rescue the peace process, apart from certain esoteric references to America's support for the UN Security Council's two resolutions and the principle of land for peace. There is considerable doubt about America's position regarding these basic principles. It seems that Mrs Albright has no new suggestions other than those laid down by Netanyahu: security is paramount; Arafat is entirely to blame for violence — even if that violence comes from Israel itself; and the Doha conference must take place at any cost.

It was hoped that Mrs Albright, the representative of a country which assumes sole responsibility for peace in the Middle East and refuses to allow any other party — including Europe — to interfere, would offer practical solutions and definite ideas. Some may even have hoped that she would reaffirm the principles already agreed upon by all parties to resolve the current stalemate and define the responsibility for any shortcomings.

She preferred to employ soothing diplomacy with Netanyahu and force with Arafat, courtesy with Mubarak, Fahd and Hussein, and soothsaying with Assad. She departed without making the slightest impact — except to announce that she would not be returning to the region, "unless"... Nobody seems to know what that "unless" can be.



Soapbox

Gold, and a sword

The press campaign that preceded Secretary of State Albright's visit to the Middle East, led by *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, demanded that she openly support Israel against the Arabs. That, indeed, is what Albright did on the first day of her visit to Israel. She declared quite clearly that the core of the problem is Israeli security. Arafat and the Palestinian Authority must devote themselves to crushing Hamas and disarming the resistance.

Albright knows that the current crisis has reduced the Oslo Accords to dust. Reducing the crisis to a threat to Israeli security will not lead to the resumption of the peace process. It will not help the Palestinian or Arab regimes, even those willing to make more concessions, to find a face-saving pretext before returning to the negotiating table. In other words, Madeleine Albright knows perfectly well that her statements will only serve to sharpen the crisis.

Why did the US secretary of state come to the region? Most probably, she did not come to search for a way out of the deadlock. Her visit concerns the forthcoming Middle East/North Africa (MENA) economic conference in Doha. Syrian opposition to the Doha conference has increased, and support for the Syrian stance is steadily growing, as a result of the obvious failure of Oslo. There is no longer any justification for attending.

Madeleine Albright came bearing gold in one hand, and a sword in the other. US aid and US troops serve to remind the hesitant and the reluctant that, no matter how strong the grounds for Syrian refusal, the American rationale remains irresistible.



This week's Soapbox speaker is a professor of international law at Ain Shams University.

Hossam Eissa

No magic formula

If the Clinton administration is to convince the Arabs that it can be an honest broker, writes **James Zogby**, it must continue to challenge Netanyahu — and Congress

Given the political climate in the US and the Middle East, no one had high expectations for the outcome of the secretary of state's first foray in the region. But President Clinton is clearly aware of the grave dangers that exist if the peace process continues to falter — dangers not only to Israelis and Palestinians, but also to US standing and its interests in the Middle East as a whole.

At a recent meeting with members of the Arab American community, President Clinton made it clear that Secretary Albright must convince Israelis and Palestinians and the US's other Arab allies that the US is committed to be a truly honest broker in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As low a measure of success as this might be, it is a necessary prerequisite to any further progress. It is also a useful guide by which to evaluate the secretary's visit.

Regardless of the fact that, when pressed, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has made halting concessions, there is still widespread agreement that he is not committed to full implementation of the peace accords signed by his predecessors. While Netanyahu recently offered a map of territorial concessions he is willing to make in final status talks (considered by some in the Jewish community as a breakthrough, since no Likud leader has ever agreed to any territorial concessions), these are dismissed by some administration officials as "unacceptable cantons" which fall far short of fulfiling Palestinian aspirations. In any case, Netanyahu has now withdrawn consideration of any further redeployments until his security demands are met.

The Israeli prime minister appears to feel that he can play his cards as he wishes because he has strong backing from the US Congress and the politically powerful US Jewish community.

To reinforce this point, a paid advertisement endorsed by five US senators appeared in major US papers on the day before the secretary's departure. The ad, an open letter to President Clinton, spoke of PA President Yasser Arafat in disgracefully harsh language, calling him a "villan" and terming his behaviour as "macabre". The ad and a similar letter sent to the president by 44 members of Congress urged the secretary to focus her visit on Palestinian terrorism and to refrain from asking for Israeli concessions.

Has the administration resisted this pressure? At two meetings Arab American leaders had with National Security Advisor Sandy Berger and Under-Secretary of State Thomas Pickering just before the secretary's departure, we pressed the administration to adopt a more evenhanded approach. We specifically called on the secretary to reaffirm that the basis of the peace process was "land for peace" and implementation of UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, and urged her to pressure the Israelis on settlement construction, acts of collective punishment against Palestinians (house demolitions, land confiscation, and closure).

We also urged her to push for implementation of the interim accords. Finally, we noted that, if the secretary was to succeed in restoring confidence in US leadership, she must use public diplomacy in an even-handed manner. It would be unacceptable, we noted, if the only public message that came out of her meetings focused on security issues. If public pressure was to be used with the Palestinian side, it must be used with the Israelis as well.

While many Arabs have faulted the secretary for focusing on the security dimension of her mission, it is important to note the significant portion of her message that addressed Arab concerns with the peace process. Even when addressing the issue of terrorism, the secretary and other administration officials voiced their concern not only in terms of their concern for the loss of innocent Israeli lives, but the damage that terrorism does to the Palestinians, noting that these attacks target the peace process and the PA, and threaten Palestinian gains. In fact, one official noted with frustration that each act of terrorism is timed to take pressure off the Israeli prime minister's failings and to focus US and Israeli attention on the security issues instead of on Israeli policies.

At the same time, Secretary Albright did reaffirm US commitment to the "land for peace" formula and to implementation of UN resolutions 242 and 338. Throughout the week, administration officials continued to refer to PNA President Yasser Arafat as "our partner in the peace process", thus refuting congressional efforts to demonise and isolate the Palestinian leader.

And the secretary reserved her sharpest comments for acts which destroy confidence in the peace process citing settlement building, land confiscation, demolition of houses, and confiscation of Jerusalem I.D. cards. She also spoke eloquently of her concerns for Palestinian suffering, referring on a number of occasions to the "difficult" and "horrible" conditions in which Palestinians are forced to live, and calling on the Israelis to make efforts to improve Palestinian daily life.

To add further clarity to her message, the secretary also had a well-publicised meeting with the widow of assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin and a meeting with Israeli President Ezer Weizman, the contents of which were later revealed to the press by State Department Spokesman Jamie Rubin.

Following her visit with Secretary Albright to the tomb of her late husband, Leah Rabin spoke harshly of the current Israeli prime minister. She accused Netanyahu of attempting to "bring Yasser Arafat to his knees" and said she had doubts that the prime minister wanted peace. Mrs Rabin said: "To say it is possible for Arafat to stop the terror without there being forward movement toward peace is impossible."

To add to the pressure on Netanyahu, the State Department Spokesman told reporters that President Ezer Weizman had said that "the US should be prepared to pressure Bibi to finish the second stage of redeployment on the West Bank". Rubin added, "I thought that was a remarkable statement by the Israeli President." According to Rubin, Weizman also said that "Israel should not use economic pressure against the Palestinians."

While some Arab commentators heard only part of Secretary Albright's message, it would be unfair to ignore the rest, or the carefully staged events with Mrs Rabin and the Israeli President and the impact that they were designed to have. Clearly the secretary was not misunderstood in the US, where the headlines told the story: "Albright's visit bares US-Israel division over peace process" (*Washington Post*); "Albright asks Israel to take time out on settlements" (*New York Times*), "Albright draws fire from Israelis; asks for time out on Jewish settlements" (*Washington Times*).

As Secretary Albright noted when departing, she had no magic formula that could save the peace process. Given the hostility of Congress, the intransigence of the Netanyahu government, and the persistence of acts of violence designed to disrupt the peace process, she faced huge hurdles in her effort.

Her goals were, therefore, limited. To shake up the internal Israeli debate, to restore hope to a beleaguered Palestinian society, and to convince all parties that if violence would end that pressure not only would but could be focused on the political issues that must be resolved to move the process forward.

While Secretary Albright's appeal has been accepted by PNA President Yasser Arafat, it was rejected by the Israeli prime minister. She has succeeded, however, in provoking a strong internal debate in Israel. Most recent polls show that 60 per cent of all Israelis are dissatisfied with the prime minister's performance and 55 per cent specifically displeased with his policies toward the Palestinian Authority.

It remains to be seen whether or not the secretary's goal of convincing the Arab world that the US is a fair and balanced partner will be believed, but it would be unfortunate if she is not given credit for making a strong effort in this direction.

The real test of US resolve will come in the next few weeks. If violence can be stopped, how the US responds to Israel's rejection of Secretary Albright's appeal will be a critical factor in the overall assessment of her trip. The difficulties faced by the administration will, of course, be compounded by expected pressure from a hostile Congress. But, if the US is to convince the region that it is a fair and firm honest broker, Congress and Israel must continue to be challenged, if what is left of the peace process can be saved.

The writer is the president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Millennium in the Middle East

Word games hold sway at the end of one millennium and the beginning of another — but behind the words, the games are all about power, politics and money, writes **Nawal El-Saadawi**

I am optimistic by nature — I do not know why. The child inside me can offer great hopes for what the future holds in store for us, as women, on the threshold of the 21st century. But sometimes this child disappears, especially in our region: the "Middle East". The name itself shows that others have named us in relation to their location in the world. If we were to name Britain, for example, we could describe it as the "Middle West", and the United States could be the "Far West". Will this happen in the coming millennium? Maybe then men will stop naming wo/men, and we might give men another name, one derived from the womb (such as bomb).

Almost every morning, I open my eyes to news of bombing, bloodshed, massacres, people killed in our region. Almost every day, I read about "peace". The longer I live in this world, the more I discover "war" hiding under the word peace, injustices hidden beneath justice, dictatorship disguised as democracy, and colonialism protected by freedom.

Everywhere I go in the "Middle West" or the "Far West", I am asked about my identity, my nationality, my gender, my age, my class, my religion, my culture, my politics and my sexuality. If my answers do not fit in, they are not recorded. The international media, just like our national media, is controlled. Freedom of speech is like the free market. It is not free, except when freedom means "freedom of the powerful to do whatever they like".

I am a novelist, a writer, who refuses to play the game. To be a writer, you have to know how words play games. The most famous word in this millennium (and probably in the next) is "peace". It looks wonderful on paper and in conferences. But in reality, we have never known peace under this word. We are injected with the word every day by the postmodern media. But more and more people are killed every day, in Palestine, Iraq, Algeria, Sudan, Zaire, Rwanda, Pakistan, Afghanistan...

Some days ago, an innocent child was shot dead by Israeli soldiers, his mother and sisters abused and killed, their house demolished. I saw the photograph in the newspapers. The house was knocked down by bulldozers. Why? They are Palestinians.

When your nationality is not the right one, when your gender and class are against you, what do you do as we approach the millennium?

On 1 July 1997, I participated in a demonstration in the streets of New York, in front of the tall building of the United Nations. Children organised the demonstration. Their aim was to stop all economic embargoes in the world. In Iraq alone, 450 children die of hunger every day because of the embargo. After the demonstration, we met top officials in the UN. We discovered that the UN has no power. It is dominated by the United States. Now we call the UN "The United Nations of America" (UNA).

If you have nuclear military power and the veto in the Security Council, you do not need international law or the UN Charter. You can violate all laws and all UN resolutions and still be right, legal and respected.

"Power" is the key word in this millennium and the next, as long as we are governed by the capitalist patriarchal system. All injustices based on race, gender, class, nationality, religion, colour, or creed can be justified in the name of God, the Lord, the King, the President, the husband, the father, or the leader of the United States. Everything can be reversed as long as you have power internationally, nationally, or in the family. Double standards are a universal law.

War, the arms race, foreign invasion, economic embargoes, increasing poverty and unemployment, drugs, rising religious fundamentalism, globalisation, neo-colonial exploitation, resource depletion, environmental degradation, women's veiling and circumcision, inappropriate technologies, structural adjustment and World Bank conditions: these are some of the problems we suffer in our region. They are not considered the result of the global and local ruling system, but the result of our underdevelopment, our lack of intelligence, our inability to rise to higher levels of morality and spirituality. Why? Is it our black or brown colour, our culture or religion as Muslims or Arabs?

The word "spirituality" is a very ambiguous word. It is frequently used nowadays, and will be used more and more in the next millennium, with other similar words, such as family values, moral values, authentic cultural identity, or religious freedom.

No wonder American aid to poor countries, including Russia, is linked to religious freedom. Sometimes it is linked to democracy or a multi-party system, human rights, or even female circumcision.

Anything can be used or abused to hide certain political or economic gains. Everything in our life is political. Love and sex cannot be separated from politics. The family unit is the basis of the state.

The political movements known as religious fundamentalism, which have increased in all major religions of the world, have been accompanied by a vigorous promotion of spirituality, morality and family values. All these enforce differentiated gender and class roles, with the intention of subordinating women to men, the weaker to the powerful, the poorer to the richer, the ruled to the ruler.

Religious fundamentalist groups, whether Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist or other, pose acute problems for us as women, especially working women, who earn their living and do not expect men to provide for them.

Many spiritual groups share substantial areas of doctrine with religious fundamentalist groups. They are all political. If God orders his chosen people in his holy book to kill other people and invade their land, it means that the holy book is political, since military orders are of a political nature and have political and economic aims.

As we approach the millennium, we witness the rise of so-called globalisation, the free market, religious freedom, democracy, multi-party politics, multiculturalism, pluralism... Yet the result of all these freedoms is nothing but more killing, more terrorism, more poverty, more fanaticism — religious, ethnic, sexual, racial or national.

The free market sends us bad food, bad meat, nuclear waste. It is the freedom of the powerful to exploit and deceive. International and national laws require, explicitly or implicitly, that a small country obey a big country, exactly as a wife should obey her husband in personal status law. The rule of obedience legitimates the disciplining of the weaker by the stronger, and thus makes our countries vulnerable to military and economic sanctions exactly as it legitimates disciplining of the wife by the husband, and thus makes women vulnerable to physical abuse.

UN Security Council codes and vetoes reinforce the oppressive aspect of the international law of obedience, exactly as the personal status code helps enforce the wife's obedience to her husband.

Contemporary fundamentalism in the five major religions promotes doctrines related to women which are very similar to those preached to slaves. Women may be considered spiritually equal to men in heaven, but not physically equal on earth, their religious duty is one of submission to their husbands; they should feel happy with their inferior position and accept beating, divorce, or economic and sexual deprivation, since these are punishments for their sins as daughters of Eve, the original sinner.

In the US and other Western Christian societies, there are explicit and implicit laws which prohibit equality between men and women, or between coloured and white people. Almost all types of racial, sexual and class discrimination are based on the so-called divine plan, on the spiritual superpower in heaven, behind which the material superpower on earth operates.

Women's oppression is not linked to Islam only, as is maintained by many Westerners, including feminists. This contention is part of the international political game. It provokes Muslims to defend their religion, and others to defend theirs.

The debate now is a religious debate. The conflict in the world is no longer political or economic but cultural, religious, and spiritual. Conferences are held to discuss something called the "clash of civilisations", or cultures, or religions. The Arab-Israeli conflict is cultural or religious, between Muslims and Jews. It is part of the global and local political-economic game.

The writer is a novelist and the author of many works on feminist and other social and political issues.





Listings

EXHIBITIONS

World Press Photographs
Opera House Gallery, Opera House grounds (in front of the Small Hall). Daily 10am-10pm. Until 20 Sept.
Outstanding photos taken during the period of Sept 1996-August 1997.

Collective Exhibition
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 20 Sept.
A retrospective display of works by Assem Sharaf, Dina El-Gharib, Hassan Ali Ahmed, Hazem El-Mestekawi, Hisham El-Zeini, Hussein Sharaf, Mohamed Abdel-Moneim, Omar El-Fayoumi and Sherif Abdel-Badie.

Takeyoshi Tanuma (Photographs)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 21 Sept.
Exhibited under the title Children of the Planet Earth, the photographs are of children from 106 countries to which the photographer travelled.

Assala Association for Contemporary and Folkloric Arts
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Mina Sarofim (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Mansour St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 27 Sept.

Photographs from India
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. 23-29 Sept.

Group Show
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, 4th floor, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8597. Daily 12pm-10pm. Until 30 Sept.
Works by Hamed Nada, Adham Wanli, Hosni El-Banani, Seif Wanli, Fatma Rifaat, Mohamed Nagui and Zakaria El-Zeini, among others.

Group Exhibition
Italian Cultural Centre, 3 Sheikh El-Marsafi, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Opening: 15 Sept 7pm. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-12pm & 6pm-8pm. Until 30 Sept.
Inspired by Ariosto's Orlando Furioso, Irina Ionesco, Pino Chimenti, Angelo Canevari and Amal Maatouk exhibit photographs, mixed media works, sculptures, and paintings, respectively, under the title Women, Knights, Weapons and Love Stories.

Summer Collection
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Fri, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 30 Sept.
Works by Tahiya Halim, Abdel-Wahab Morsi, Salem Salah, George Bahgori, Hassan Abdel-Fattah, among others.

Group Exhibition
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily 5pm-10pm. Until 30 Sept.
Works by over 20 artists, including George Bahgori, Mohamed Abla, Salah Hassouna, Xavier Puigmarti, Esmat Dawistashi and Aziz El-Hihi.

Whermann
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. 22 Sept-3 Oct.
Black and white photographs under the title Artist Portraits, taken between 1962 and 1995 of Alberto Giacometti, Wilfredo Lam, Ossip Zadkine, Henry Moore and Kumi Sugai, among others.

Sobhi Guirguis (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Opening 23 Sept, 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm, Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 17 October.

Suzanne Mubarak Children's Museum
34 Abu Bakr El-Seddiq St, Heliopolis. Tel 249 9915. Daily exc Mon, 9am-2pm.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.
Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil and his wife.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq, Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily 9am-4pm.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily 9am-5pm.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/1520. Daily exc Fri, 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 2pm-4pm.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934).

FILMS

Festival of Czech Films
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861.
21 Sept, 8pm: **America** (1994), based on the novel by Franz Kafka and directed by Vladimir Michalek.
22 Sept, 8pm: **The Princess from the Pond** (1995), directed by Zdenek Troska.
23 Sept, 8pm: **Indian Summer** (1995), directed by Sasa Gedeon.
24 Sept, 8pm: **The Ride** (1994), directed by Jan Sverak.

French Films
French Cultural Centre annex, 27 Sabri Abu Alam St, Ismailia Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 417 4824.
18 Sept, 7pm: **Smoking**, directed by Alain Resnais.
22 Sept, 7pm: **No Smoking**, directed by Alain Resnais.
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madrasat El-Hoquq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679.
24 Sept, 8pm: **Smoking**, directed by Alain Resnais.

Spanish Films
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Adly St, Kodak passage, Downtown. Tel 395 2326.
22 Sept, 9pm: **Morena Clara** (1936), directed by Florian Rey.
23 Sept, 9pm: **Suspiros de España** (1938), directed by Benito Perojo.
24 Sept, 9pm: **La Lola Se Va A Los Puertos** (1947), directed by Juan de Orduña.

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
22 Sept, 8pm: **Sostiene Pereira**, based on the novel by Antonio Tabucchi, directed by Roberto Faenza and starring Marcello Mastroianni.
23 Sept, 8pm: **La Noia**, based on the novel by Alberto Moravia, directed by Damiano Damiani and starring Bette Davis.

Faces of Japan: The Entertainer & Young Baseball Heroes
Japanese Inormation and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 18 Sept, 6pm.

Love On the Pyramids Plateau
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madrasat El-Hoquq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 22 Sept, 8pm.
Directed by Atef El-Tayeb

Russian Films
Pushkin Centre for Russian Culture, 127 El-Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 360 6371.

Russian and Egyptian film screenings every Monday at 7pm.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.


Mina Sarofim

Double Team
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
*Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Normandy**, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **El-Haram**, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Radio**, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **El-Salam**, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Tahrir**, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm. **MGM**, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Sphinx**, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. **Odeon I**, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797.*
Youssef Chahine's latest mega-production, starring Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

Liar Liar
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.

The Saint
*Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Ramsis Hilton II**, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.*

El-Mar'a Wel-Satour (The Woman and the Cleaver)
*Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Miami**, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Roxy**, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Rivoli II**, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. **Tiba I**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9 pm.*
Nabila Ebeid's latest venture involves the hacking to pieces of men.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
*Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. **Tiba II**, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9pm. **Cosmos II**, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Diana Palace**, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Odeon II**, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. **Lido**, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. **Cairo Sheraton**, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight.*

The Devil's Own
Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St., Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Anaconda
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Thur-Sat, midnight show.

DANCE

Prague Festival Ballet
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 22-25 Sept, 9pm.

MUSIC

George Gruntz Concert Jazz Band
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 17 Sept, 9pm.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Sept, 9pm.
Conducted by Salah Ghobashi.

Yehia Ghannam Group
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Sept, 9pm.

Big Band Trumpet Ensemble
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St. Tel 391 9956. 19 Sept, 9pm.
Raouf El-Ganayni performs.

Master Symphony II
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 20, Sept, 9pm.
Piano soloist Brigitte Engelhard and conductor Ahmed El-Saedi perform Mozart's Symphony No 35 in D major K 385, De Falla's Nights in the Gardens of Spain and Tchaikovsky's "Manfred" Symphony op 58.

Frankophoniker Group
Gomhouriya Theatre, as above. 20 Sept, 9pm.
A German musical show.

Harp and Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 Sept, 9pm.
Manal Moheddin (harp) and Nevine Allouba (soprano) perform.

THEATRE

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm.
With Samir Ghanem, Elham Shahin and Bothayna Rashwan.

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.
Starring and directed by Mohamed Sobhi.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.
Directed by Mohamed Sobhi and starring all the family members of the televised series.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.
A large crowd including Mahmoud El-Guindi, Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar and Ashraf Abdel-Baqi and a contingent of Russian ballet dancers; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm.
Said Saleh and dancer Nagwa Fouad, directed by Essam El-Sayed.

Ta'm El-Kalam (The Taste of Words)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Abdullah Mahmoud, Farouk Naguib and Manal Salama, directed by Hossameddin Saleh.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and Ahmed Ibrahim in a light musical.

LECTURES

Cattle Heads and Cattle Cults in Ancient Egypt
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 0319. 22 Sept, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Penelope Wilson, Department of Antiquities, Cambridge.

Deterioration of the Islamic Architectural Heritage in Cairo: Suggestions for Conservation and Restoration
American Research Centre, 2 Simon Bolivar Sq, Garden City. Tel 354 8239. 24 Sept, 6pm.
Lecture by Dr Saleh Lamei, general director of the Centre for Conservation and Preservation of the Islamic Architectural Heritage.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

TWO, for want of a better term, "naive" artists — **Zakaria Soliman** and **Saber Attallah** — exhibit their works at the **Spanish Cultural Centre**, Alexandria. In Soliman's mixed media works, strange worlds come into being: stars transpire from faces, animals grow human hands, hands grow doves. Attallah's work, which combines motifs drawn from folkloric art with more organic, vegetal elements, exhibits a daring use of colour and a strong sense of compositional balance.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**

Zakaria Soliman

Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre Awards

International Jury's Awards:
Best Performance: *70 Hill Lane*, the Improbable Theatre Company, UK
Best Director: Eva Magyar and Csaba Horvath for *The Dissimulators*, the Shamans Physical Theatre Company, Hungary
Best Actress: Chrisanthi Douzi for her performance in *Atrides*, Spring Theatre, Greece
Best Actor: jointly to Rainsford for his performance in *The Descent*, Chapel of Change Company, Australia and Mirush Kashi for his performance in *Socrates' True Apology*, The National Theatre, Albania
Best Stage Technique: *Aquarium*, Laboratorio Teatro Settimo, Italy
The Algerian Love Journey by the Theatre Group of the Culture and Information Centre received a special mention from the jury as a mark of solidarity with the Algerian theatre artists and as a tribute to those who lost their lives fighting to keep theatre alive in Algeria.
The Egyptian Critics' Awards:
Best Performance: *Atrides*, Spring Theatre, Greece
Best Director: Luis Goravan, *Medea*, El-Globo Teatro Hispano-Americano, Spain, and Centro de Directores Apra El Nuevo Teatro, Venezuela (a joint production)
Best Actress: Chrisanthi Douzi, *Atrides*
Best Actor: Maski Suda, *Holocaust 20th Century*, Total Theatre Nihei Yokata, Japan
Best Stage Technique: *The Descent*, Chapel of Change, Australia
Best Music and Sound Effects: Legris Gnogreon, *Atrides*



Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries Awards

International Competition Awards:
Best Film: *Deep Waters* (France)
Best Director: Jacques Deschamps for *Deep Waters*
Best Actor: Nur El-Sherif for his role in *Afreet Al-Nahar* (Demon of the Day; Egypt)
Best Actress: Ezchek Benirso for her role in *Please Don't Go* (Turkey)
Best Supporting Actor: Mohamed El-Taggy
Best Supporting Actress: Laura Cebida for her role in *Loving Look* (Spain)
Best Editing: *Loving Look*
Best Screenplay: *Loving Look*
Best Cinematography: *Before the End of Time* (Greece)
Best Directorial Debut: Peter Nicolaief for *Wonderful Years that Sucked* (Czech Republic) & Sandra Nashaat for *Mabrouk and Bolboul* (Egypt)
Special Jury's Award: *Please Don't Go* (Turkey)
Panorama of Egyptian Cinema Awards:
Best Director: Inas El-Degheidi for *Dentella* (Lace)
Best Actress: Yousra for her role in *Dentella*
Best Actor: Yehia El-Fakharani for his role in *Mabrouk and Bolboul*
Best Supporting Actor: Al-Montassir Bill-Lah for his role in *Mabrouk and Bolboul*
Best Supporting Actress: Manal Afifi for her role in *Al-Rasif* (The Pavement)
Best Editing: Salwa Bekir for *Dentella*
Best Cinematography: Maher Radi for *Dentella*

Nature morte

David Blake
listens to the dark

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Pops I; Omar Khairat, solo piano; Mostafa Nagi, conductor; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 13 Sept.

Omar Khairat's music is aloof, expensive-sounding and detached — very. The concert he gave with Cairo Symphony Orchestra under Mostafa Nagi had super flair, his own. No one here in Cairo makes the same noises as he does. He is imitated and plagiarised, but nothing comes close to the original.

He is up in the trees. He knows his gifts makes an effect and doesn't give a damn. But this attitude of his merely brings his audience closer, and he has a big one. They enjoy the slight slouch he gives to the shoulders as he settles down without the slightest mannerism to play the piano. He and his music are immediately up in the leaves and branches, removed most definitely from the adoring crowd. He has the media trick of bending forwards but keeping his distance as, at the same time, he slightly bends backwards. Everything about him is affluent and well-covered — and so is his music. It is not the sound of need, of lonely souls wandering through the night of hells and frustrations. Hades is far away. People may die, get shot in Khairat's music, but they never kill themselves.

What can you do with the music, the core of which is irrepressible? Khairat suggests people and places, for example lunches with blue point oysters flown in from Kingston Bay, elegant people and expensive situations outside the range of ordinary money. His tone has that excessive surface which moves easily into cinema, media and sometimes theatre and always suggests something big is coming up. It does. It is the Khairat gift of melody. Real melodies — and his are — are like going up a tall building in a lift. The song starts out at a certain level then shoots up to floor 8: the melody is still there but changing. Up again to maybe 21, its apex: it has a new colour, but is the same creation. Then it plumps down to the ground floor and the same face, in a different guise, appears. All "melodic" composers know these facts. They cannot be bought or taught. You either have them or you don't. Fame is no cover up for their lack. Neither Sondheim nor Lloyd-Weber have a melody-maker inside them. Khairat has. And it is a feeling in the air that makes an audience know what is coming and wait for it.

At this concert many of the anticipated "favourites" arrived. The orchestra weaves the opening patterns, then there is, almost, a hush which vibrates through and from the listeners — and then the Khairat piano swerves into the melody. It is palpably physical. Lehar has it; Verdi has it; it belongs in opera, yet Khairat so far veers away from the voice.

How can this music be described? We are moving into a period of musical confusion with the doubtful aid of technology that everything is in the meltdown turning into something else. Where will Khairat be in the next 20 years? Is it pop, op, trip-bop plain, collage post-nouveau or man-handled dissonant counterpoint? His music has such strong charisma it seems as if he is just beginning to compose.

After the overture, which was a sop to traditional values, we settled into the big tune from the Khairat *Ballet El-Nil* done at the opera a few years ago. The ballet could survive; the tunes have; they really make for a powerful atmosphere which enters the emotions of an audience. Then came *Uncle Ahmed's Case*, sad and disturbing, followed by *Enchanting Perfumes*. All these are big city music; everyone knows them; they echo down through the lanes and tunnels of Cairo.

The melodies of the first half of the concert, before the break, moved the big audience. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra seemed ferociously happy with the tunes and with the enthusiasm of Mostafa Nagi's handling of them. Khairat's sheer bravado in managing his own melodies is breathtaking because he throws them up in the light for you to admire and then without ado scrubs them out with a thick black chalk... and we begin again from scratch. He never allows time for a song to go flat, to lose emotional momentum.

After the break things changed. We began a form of listener's dance. We settled into the big time form: soft and slow, loud and fast. First a hint of romance, then the chase begins. Through a maze of rhythms, blue, red, jazz, fox-trot, even rumba and flamenco, we are driven as in a police car. But are we the police or the quarry on the run? Crook or cop? Tearing along past buses, human bodies, piles of almost anything bursting with living matter, we go through tunnels over bridges. What is it? Cairo or the Big Dustman himself? We'll see you again at the river crossing or in the river itself. The voice of the mega-palace is the voice of Khairat and it is not restful.


Pantalone e Colombina

La Compagnia Teatro Immagine and Archicembalo Ensemble di Venezia: Pantalone e Colombina; music by Mozart; Enrico Zanovello, conductor; Gomhouriya Theatre, 11 Sept.

This performance was restful. Facing stage, down left, was placed at the side the Archicembalo Ensemble of six players, five strings and one cembalist, the creator of this group from Vicenza, Enrico Zanovello, a fascinating player. Lined across the stage against black curtains was the Compagnia Teatro Immagine of Venice as five characters from the Italian comedy del'arte.

The effect they make as the play begins is one of restful silence in spite of the fine Mozart playing of the musicians. You can look at each performer individually as they form a line across the stage in their respective costumes. Are these puppets, dolls, or merely activated shades of real people? They begin a sort of drama of misrepresentations. Each of the characters seems to be in trouble and finds his neighbour a nuisance. Each puppet grows in character. Colombina becomes a delicious idiot. She primps about, a smile for every character on stage, not one of whom seems to recognise her or each other. She is dressed in sunflowers, as symbols of a setting sun, not a bloom at its height.

There is some trouble. Romance rears its head among the creatures and heads wag warningly. The puppets — Pantalone, Dottore, Arlecchino and Pierrot — circle around Colombina. They have no identity but their costumes. What remains is doubt, slight annoyance, insecurity, a sense of being lost, or found — what's the difference? They all shrug. All they seem to feel is annoyance, but at what? A fly passing.

The little dance grows more serious. What is it a dance of? Life? Or, could it be of that other thing? No mention of the word. All motion stops — only Mozart continues down at the shadows on the left.

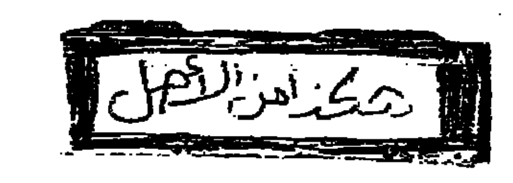
Don't discuss anything, just dance. Jig about and, for God's sake, smile. These genial idiots have a lot of us in them. Hoffmansthal once said be careful of the comedia del'arte, its smile has another side.

The little jigging group is not quite so funny now. Harlequin falls flat in a somatic fit. Is he...? Could he be...? Don't say the word. Just be silent, and don't be silly. No one knows anything. Better not use words, look what happened to Leopardi. Silence is best under all conditions.

Anyway there's always Mozart. That man there, that round thing in black velvet like a football, could be Pantalone or it could be... you for God's sake or... me.

Harlequin has revived. You see he was not... Don't worry, eat well, keep dancing. It's all written in the mirror of life.

The Mozart ends.



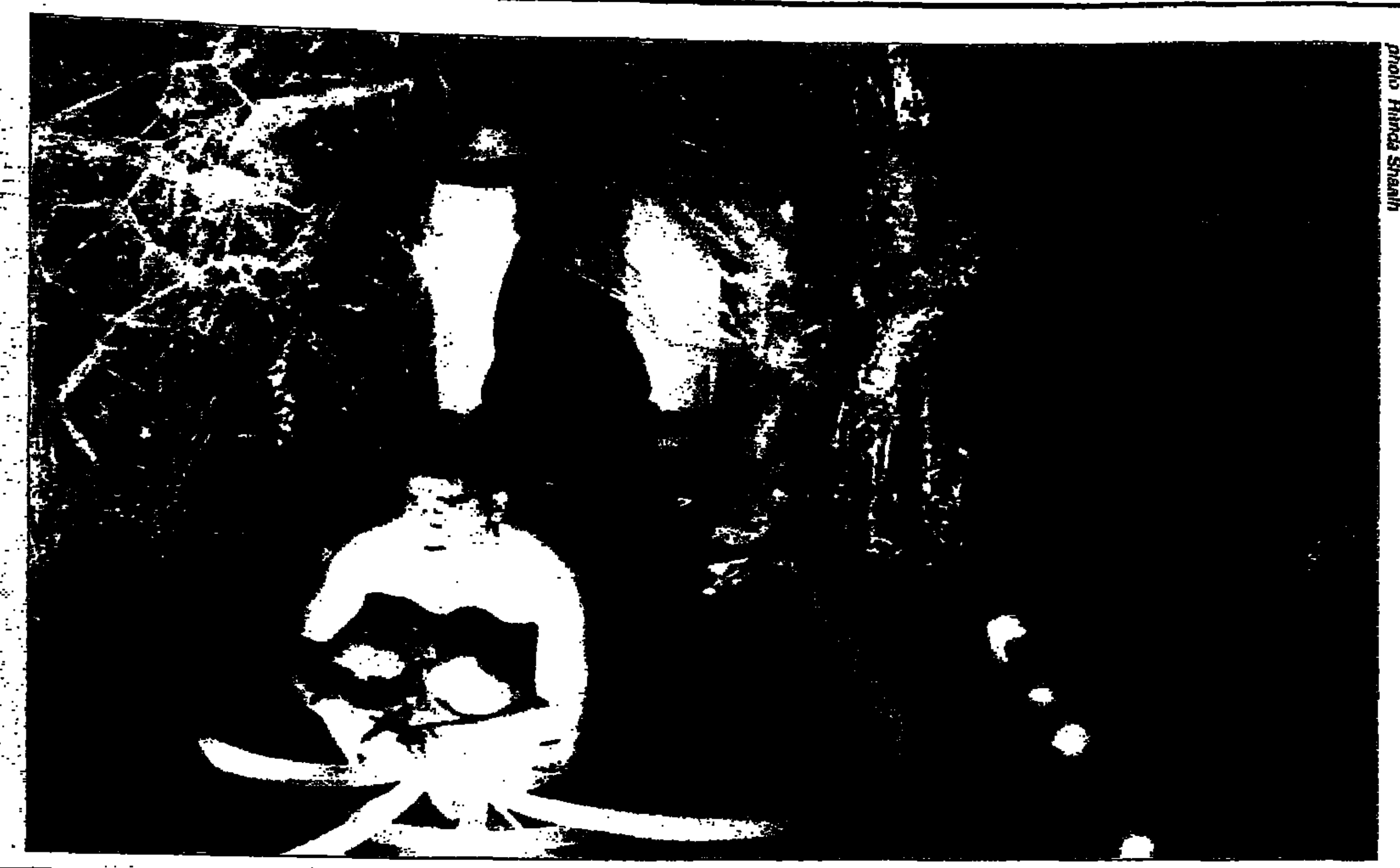


photo: Randa Shaath







Clockwise from far left: *Aquarium* (Italy), winner of Best Stage Technique Award at the CIFET; *Journey* (Egypt) to be performed for two more weeks; *Mabrouk and Bolboul* which received two awards at the Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries; Inas El-Degheidi, winner of Best Director Award for *Dentella* (Lace); Nur El-Sherif, named Best Actor for his role in *Afreet El-Nahar* (Demon of the Day)

Identity crisis

Khairiya El-Beshlawi gives a round up of the Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries and discusses the award-winning entries

For well over a decade, the Egyptian film industry has been in the doldrums, due to the paucity of funds, competition from American films and satellite channels, among other things. That Egyptian cinema has nevertheless been putting up a fitful fight against these heavy odds was evidenced at the 13th Alexandria Film Festival for Mediterranean Countries. Only five Egyptian films participated this year — an all-time low since the festival was established in 1979; Egyptian entries in the Panorama of Egyptian Cinema competition alone used to be twice as many films.

Furthermore, these five films, being the only new releases in Egypt at the moment, need not reflect the highest quality that Egyptian cinema is capable of producing. Indeed, the five entries were at best mediocre, and at worst not worth considering. In the latter category were *Al-Rasif* (The Pavement), directed by Murad El-Kholi and starring Farouk El-Fishawi, and *Sa'at Al-Intiqam* (Hour of Revenge), directed by Ahmed El-Sab'awi and starring El-Shahat Mabrouk. With the exception of *Mabrouk and Bolboul*, the Egyptian entries suffered from confused screenplays, weak plots and uninteresting subject matter. It therefore came as no surprise that the jury of the Panorama of Egyptian Cinema competition decided — for the first time in the festival's history — to withhold the awards for screenplay, mise-en-scene, and music.

Indeed, the audience and the critics had no trouble guessing correctly the award-winning films and actors, if for no other reason than because the number of awards by far exceeds the number of films participating. And while there is no doubt that the choices of the jury were fair, the films awarded have no distinction, but merely happen to be the best available. The Panorama of Egyptian Cinema competition is now no more and no less than a form of encouragement for a film industry in a state of immanent collapse.

Inas El-Degheidi's *Dentella* (Lace) carried off a host of awards: Best Director, Best Female Lead (Youssra), Best Cinematography (Maher Riad) and Best Editing (Salwa Bekir). There is no doubt that Inas El-Degheidi has shown great daring in her treatment of the subject of a love triangle. The twist in *Dentella* (Lace) is that the two women competing for the same man end up rediscovering their friendship and opting for an intimate, and fulfilling, relationship with each other. The film, which betrays a feminist slant of a Western brand, is based on a short story by Hala Sarhan, who is a close friend of Inas El-Degheidi. The screen-play was co-written by Rafik El-Sabban and Mustafa Muharram.

As for *Mabrouk and Bolboul*, this was the best Egyptian entry, at least according to this reviewer. The film explores the theme of how the power of innocence to influence vice through the relationship between the mentally handicapped but golden-hearted Mabrouk and Bolboul, the poor peasant girl who turns to prostitution to survive in the big city. Yehia El-Fakharani's Best Male Lead Award for his role as Mabrouk was richly deserved.

In contrast to *Mabrouk and Bolboul*, *Afreet El-Nahar* (Demon of the Day) is a crude political allegory of graft and sleaze with Nur El-Sherif and Ilham Shahine in the lead roles. It was for this role that Nur El-Sherif won Award for Best Male Lead in the International Competition section of the festival. It seems to me, however, that the award was given to Nur El-Sherif more in recognition of his life-time contribution as a serious actor than for an undistinguished role.

One of the main ingredients for the success of film festivals, like films, is their aesthetic, formal dimension. Headed for the first time this year by film critic Raouf Tewfik, the Alexandria Film Festival was a much better organised affair this time round. However, in the last few days, last-minute changes in the programme caused a certain amount of havoc.

But the Alexandria Film Festival's most serious problem is one of identity. The only saving grace for small, poorly-funded festivals such as this is to create unique features for themselves. It is for the organisers of the Alexandria Film Festival to ask themselves whether the event is merely a show-case for international cinema or whether it is, as it boasts, a festival for Mediterranean films. To date, the Alexandria Film Festival has not been acknowledged by the International Union for Festivals, and depends for its presence on the cultural scene on local films. Egyptian actors and seminars about the future of our film industry.

As for international films screened at this year's festival, none of them could be described as outstanding. One may single out the Spanish entry *Loving Look*, which tackles the theme of cupidity. It tells the story of a young woman who wants to kill her grandmother in order to inherit her huge mansion. When the granddaughter's accomplice/husband refuses to comply with the very original plot she has concocted to get rid of the old woman, she commits the crime and he ends up paying the price. This is one of the few films where the idea of divine justice is shunted in favour of a realism that dictates that in life, the baddies often go scot-free while the goodies pay the price of crimes they haven't committed. On the whole, *Loving Look* is a well-executed film, but one that offers little more than entertainment.

The Turkish entry *Please Don't Go*, the lead actress of which carried away the Award for Best Female Lead in the international competition, is also noteworthy. Set in the multi-cultural, multi-confessional context of Antioch of the late '30s, the film charts the story of a Greek Christian family. The heroine is a little girl, who, though thought to be an idiot, is in reality emotionally disturbed by the politically and socially charged atmosphere and the toll it takes on her father who is rendered incapable of protecting her.

The Award of Best Film in the International Competition went to the French *Deep Waters*, the directorial debut of Jacques Deschamps which stars Egyptian actor Gamil Rateb. This is a sensitive exploration of a man at three different stages in his life: adolescence, prime of life and old age. The director's originality is shown in his treatment of old age as a catalyst that releases the protagonist from the hesitancies that had previously curbed his emotional life.

The Portuguese *Ma's Sin*, which can be classified as an experimental film, provides a parallelism between a TV film which the woman protagonist watches, and her flashbacks about her many unsuccessful relationships. For a highly experimental cinematic experience, however, one has only to turn to the Spanish film *The World of the Senses*. This was directed by five women, each presenting her personal, subjective vision of one of the senses. The directors are: Isabel Gardela, Judith Collel, Teressa de Pelegri, Maria Ripoll and Nuria Olive Belles.

One thought-provoking film was the Czech entry to the International Competition, *Wonderful Years that Sucked*, the first feature film by Peter Nicolaief. As expected, the film opens old wounds and exposes the excesses of the communist regime. While no different from a whole generation now involved in re-evaluating the communist experience, Nicolaief differs in the fact that he spent a considerable chunk of his forty years living in France, returning to Czechoslovakia only after the fall of the communist regime. *Wonderful Years that Sucked* charts the nightmarish life of a young couple and their son, culminating in the husband's paranoia towards the end of the film. The film appears to be a condemnation of oppression in all its forms, and a warning that it may return in the guise of the new democracy.

The festival ended with a stellar presence from a different realm: Madeleine Albright and her entourage who were also staying at the hotel where films in competition were screened. The meeting between politics and art could not have been more literal.

Wide-eyed in the wings

Eric Grischkat reflects on his experience of this year's Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre and finds all's well that ends well

Transparent tape, floating draperies, primordial sounds, pole architecture, sphinx, purple lighting, gold lighting, black lighting, actors barely visible, side lighting, back lighting, pole architecture, sphinx, purple lighting, gold lighting, ground lighting, ten-metre manta rays, white face, people as puppets, newspaper as puppets, puppets as puppets, musical instruments no one knows the name of, swimming pools, fish people, people moving in ways you thought were impossible, make-up of every style and colour, languages you don't understand, flashes, and even a few new things — all made appearances at the Ninth Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (CIFET).

The festival concluded last Thursday night, 11 September, in the Main Hall of the Cairo Opera House in Zamalek. The Hall was jam packed with participants of the festival, organizers, judges, critics, theatre practitioners and the curious. The winners had already been announced at a press conference that afternoon, but even though all knew who the winners were, each was offered delighted cheers by the audience, both to applaud their work and to celebrate the festival as a whole.

It had only been 10 days previous to the closing ceremonies that I arrived in Cairo having just returned from the Edinburgh Theatre Festival where the American University in Cairo presented its production of Tom Coash's *Khamasseen* which I directed. The idea of going on a whirlwind tour of the CIFET seemed like a daunting task. Still, I went racing with a group of friends from show to show trying to soak up as many of the "experiments" as we could. For 10 days we squashed into a Fiat and zipped from the National Theatre to Al-Hanager to El-Gombouriya Theatre to El-Ghad to the Opera House to Wekalet El-Ghouri to the Sound and Light Hall at the foot of the Pyramids to hotel swimming pools on the edge of the Cairo-Alexandria Desert Road to anywhere else in this vast city where theatre can be done, and back again — with just enough time to stay sane with the help of a few coffees, mango juice and *sheesha* breaks in between the 22 plays we watched.

We are so fortunate in this city to get such a strong fix of theatre of various types in such a short span of time. As overloading as the experience can be, it has a strong effect on how one views theatre and life in other areas of the planet. With each play one experiences a new way of "going about it." New languages of drama are learnt from the various styles and presentations. One's theatre vocabulary is expanded. One learns what is of interest to oneself and what is not, what effects you as a human being and what does not, what makes you laugh or cry and what bores you to tears.

Creating a piece of theatre is hard work. Creating a good piece of theatre at times seems impossible, and only with the aid of the muses, intuition, discipline, a good working extension chord, the right temperature, barometric pressure and between 22 and 247 other unidentifiable factors is it allowed to happen. Many audience members were lucky during this year's festival. There was good theatre and, as at any arts festival, there were also many less pleasing pieces. I certainly have my preferences and had to leave some performances early because of "prior engagements", but I insist that each theatre experiment has something to offer — even if it is just a confirmation of what you dislike.

The most pleasing moments at the festival for me were those times when I was no longer an objective theatre practitioner learning new things about the art I love but instead transformed into a wide-eyed audience member: when the Italian production of *Flash* used an overhead projector with simple gelled transparencies to create lighting effects that dazzled, or when two Romanian actors with a highly evolved sense of Etienne Decroix corporeal mime techniques turned simple worn cabaret acts into an hilarious exact science and called it *Toujours l'amour*, or when, at midnight, at the foot of the Pyramids, I watched the Greek performance of *Atrides*. *Aquarium* was like a celebration of one of my heroes, Jacques Cousteau, and, with the help of a small hardware store behind their huge flowing drapery, magically conjured up childhood visions of what things might look like 20,000 leagues under the sea. Britain's Improbable Theatre Company, too, gave in *70 Hill Lane* a very palpable, tangible form to magical landscapes: with the aid of complex designs done with newspaper, scotch tape and four erect poles, it told a story of searching for one's future by reckoning with one's past.

I know each show that came to the festival came with the best of intentions. Some were successful, some less so. But all who participated in the festival must be applauded. Theatre has to succeed and fail. It is only through the doing of theatre and the seeing of theatre that the art and the artists involved can evolve. Success is easy to celebrate but even theatre that does not "ring our bells" is essential. As Harold Clurman, one of the co-founders of the Group Theatre in New York, used to say: "Bad plays are the manure from which great theatre can grow."

Back to the closing night celebration: *Aquarium*, the Italian production which won the International Jury Award for Best Stage Technique, was to close the night. A vast majority of the audience had probably viewed the piece during its two-day showing earlier in the festival. Most had thrilled to the playful quality that the three gifted actors used to create the wonders of the sea, and everyone sitting in the Opera House was waiting for the extraordinary images of the various forms of sea life created by the simplest of household items, and climaxing with one of the most stunning visual images I have ever seen on stage: a ten-metre manta ray created from some simple draperies, a simple wind blowing device, and the three actors. As the audience braced itself for the recreation of this huge ray, one of the actresses started to race about. "Oh no! No wind!" The other actress rushed into the wings of the theatre for help, while the third did his absolute best trying to create what images he could without the technical support that was required. As the actors raced about searching for the solution, a murmur of applause eventually turned into a thunderous ovation. All in the audience had experienced such nightmares. The building was filled with understanding and compassion and hearts reached out to the three actors, who were, no doubt, cursing their fate. They had been playing with such sweetness and joy all evening and then this! But everyone understood. Such is theatre: putting it on the line, risking, trusting, walking the tight rope, but always in danger that without the right extension chord, you just might fall. As disheartening as the last minutes of the three-actor performance was to them, I, and I am sure many others, left with a deeper appreciation of the risks that the theatre artist takes — even more so at a festival with the word "Experimental" in the title.

So good-bye to another CIFET festival. I left with the same questions as last year. Was that really experimental theatre? What is experimental? Is there such a thing as experimental theatre? Is Modern Dance experimental? Is a light show experimental? What isn't experimental theatre? Was that supposed to be good? Did that mean anything? Do I like theatre? Were there enough good shows? Were enough countries represented? Did we learn something from that? I suppose I cannot answer any of these questions, but I am grateful that for the past two years I have had the good fortune to be in Cairo to experience the experiment.

The writer is a director, actor and assistant professor in the Department of Performing and Visual Arts at the American University in Cairo.

Plain Talk

The British Ambassador Sir David Blatherwick kindly invited me to address a special meeting of women parliamentarians organised by the British Council. The topic was "Arab-British Cultural Exchange". The meeting, which is to take place today, will present me with a rare opportunity of coming into contact with key-figures in the political field, as well as a chance to reminisce about a subject which is close to my heart.

I confess I am at a bit of a loss for a starting point, given the vast nature of the topic about which I am to lecture. Seeing that it would be impossible to cover all the countries of the Arab world, I have decided to focus on Egypt, particularly since it figures so extensively in English literature. I remember a programme I used to present on the local English service entitled "Under the Spell of Egypt", in which I must have covered over 200 writers without having exhausted the material available on the subject.

I have often expressed my deep belief in cultural exchange and my aversion to all the talk about cultural invasion. Culture knows no boundaries and, as mentioned in the Charter of the International PEN, it is common currency. In the same way that Egypt and other Arab countries have benefited from British culture, they, in turn, have given Britain samples of their culture.

As evidence of the enriching nature of cultural exchange, one need look no further than Egypt during the second world war. Needless to say, cultural relations between Egypt and Britain had started much earlier, but it is the second world war period that provides the clearest expression of the value and effect of the dialogue between the two cultures.

During the second world war, Cairo (and to a lesser extent Alexandria) became a flourishing centre for art and literature. It boasted over four English literary magazines. While the majority of the articles in those magazines were devoted to English writing by English authors, a section was given to translations of Arabic poetry and short stories and to articles which dealt with Egyptian and Arab subjects.

The English Department of Cairo University boasted quite a number of British professors who were, at the same time, leading writers, poets, short story writers and novelists. These included, to name but a few, Terence Tiller and Bernard Spencer, two leading contemporary poets, as well as PH Newby, novelist and author of a trilogy on Egypt: *Picnic to Sakkara*, *Revolution and Roses* and *A Guest and His Going*. Cairo, during this period, also hosted G S Fraser and John Waller, two military poets, if I may use the expression. They both worked in the British Ministry of Information and were involved in the publication of *Salamander* magazine, a literary publication devoted to army writers, but which hosted some Egyptian writers including Ahmed Rassem and myself.

Alexandria, too, during the late 30s and early 40s, could claim for itself a number of well-known British writers: Lawrence Durrel with his *Alexandria Quartet*, D J Enright who in *Academic Year* recounted the tale of his experience as a lecturer, and Robert Liddel, who, like Enright, was a member of staff of Alexandria University.

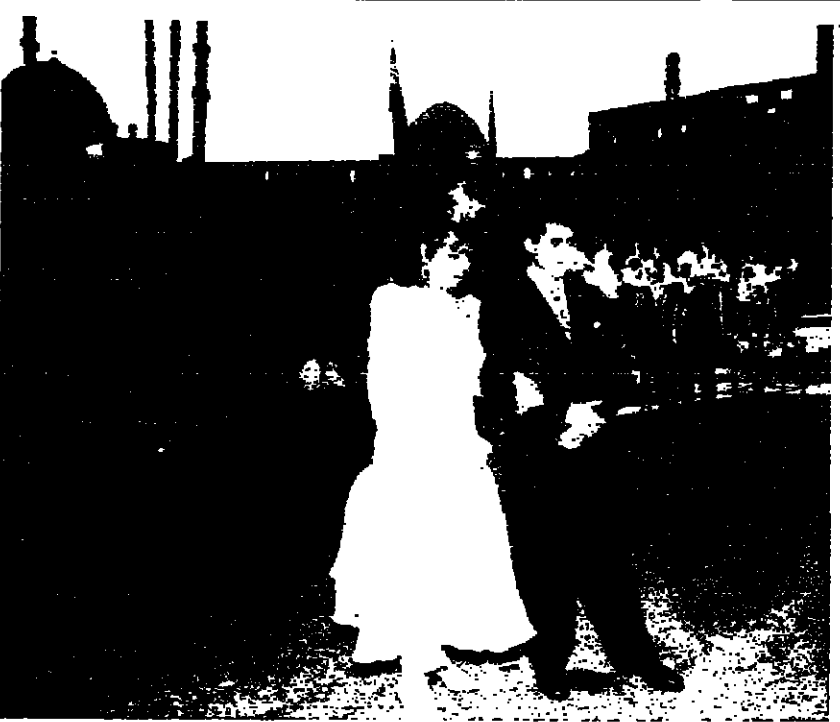
Poets, too, came under the spell of Egypt. British World War II poetry was written in Egypt, either in Cairo and Alexandria or in the Western Desert. Two anthologies, *Oasis* and *Return of Oasis*, containing poems written by members of the British armed forces, some of whom writing poetry for the first time, were published. The titles of many of the poems in the anthologies tell of the very Egyptian element in much English poetry of the late 30s-early 40s: Egyptian Evening, Egyptian Sentry, Corniche, Alexandria, On a Return from Egypt, Egyptian Madonna, Egyptian Dancer, The Pyramids, Cairo Cleopatra, Groppi's: 1st January 1943... etc.

Needless to say, there was also a whole generation of Egyptians who were influenced by their British teachers and by the multicultural atmosphere of the country at large. It was a period of give and take, a process which helped enrich the cultures involved.

Mursi Saad El-Din

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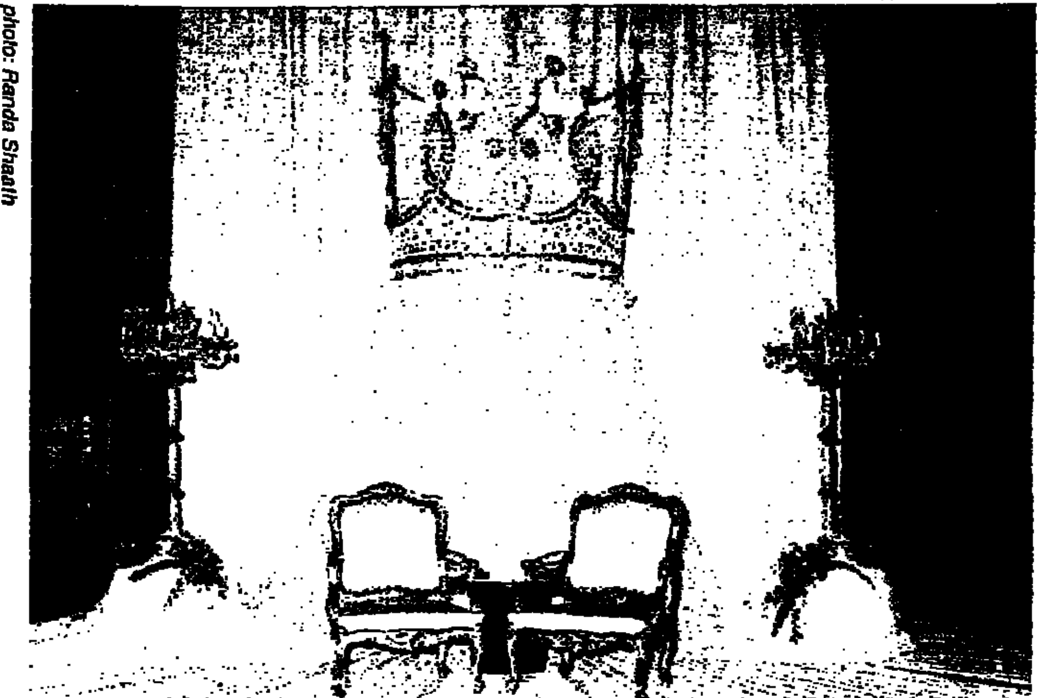
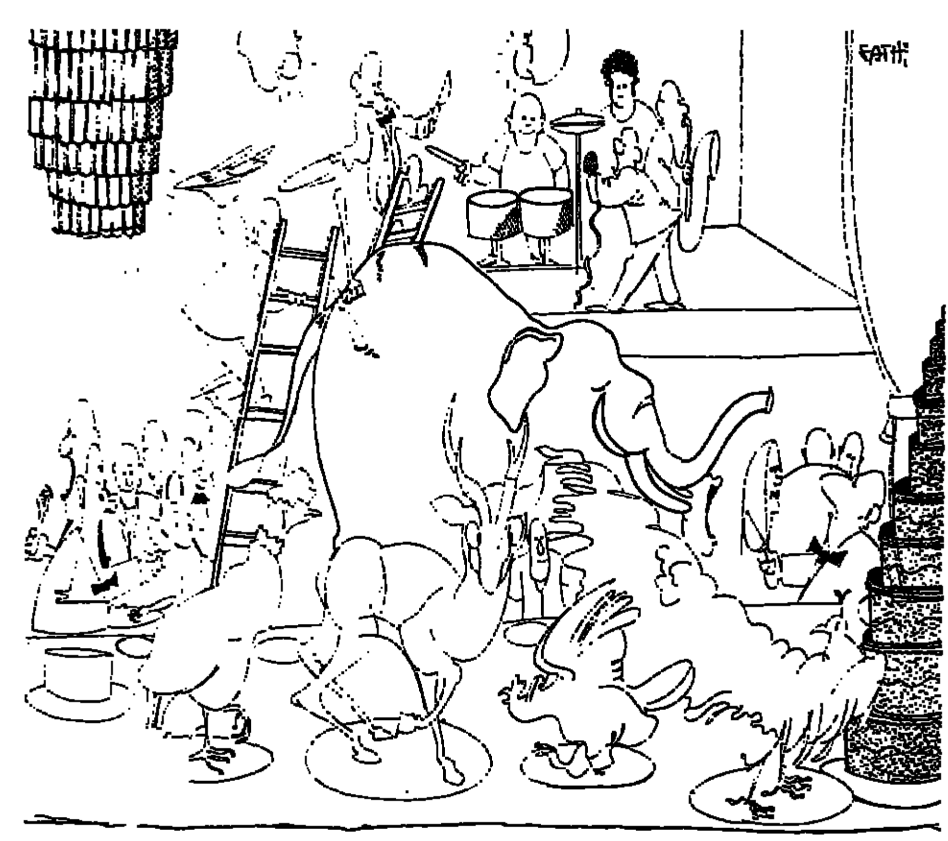


photo: Randa Shaath

Simply exchanging vows at the Citadel... or sitting in an overly expensive *kosha* to receive the wishes of a thousand guests

Billions and brides

Flowers from Holland, meats from Switzerland and cheeses from France: wedding celebrations in Egypt are a thriving business that is growing fast. Amira Howeidy monitors the new trend



Mohamed Selim, 16, was about to leave school because his father — a retired factory worker — could not afford his expenses any more, but he got lucky. A distant relative, a silversmith at Khan El-Khalili, was desperately searching for staff to help him meet the deadline of "a really big wedding". Selim was offered seventy pounds a week for polishing the silver, carrying the tools and cleaning up. He and his co-workers worked twelve hours a day to complete hundreds of candlesticks especially designed for a wedding held at one of Cairo's largest five-star hotels. The initials of the bride and bridegroom — he the son of one of Egypt's wealthiest businessmen — were engraved on each one of the silver-plated candlesticks.

"To us, a wedding is a big party with some good food and a belly dancer, which is the cost of a few of those candlesticks. But my colleagues and I made some good money out of it," says Selim. "We would be lucky to do work for another wedding."

Selim's words sum up an ongoing debate about conspicuous consumption: should millionaires have the right to hold ultra-luxurious weddings, some of which cost up to four million pounds? Critics argue that, while most Egyptians are struggling to keep food on the table, and are barely able to afford basic necessities, the rich are getting richer, ultimately provoking the poor who constitute 50 per cent of Egypt's population, according to a recent report published by the National Planning Institute in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Ironically, another report by the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS) on the distribution of the annual income of Egyptian families showed that the lowest bracket of family income includes households earning LE1,500 or less, while the highest consists of a vague underestimation of LE25,000 and more. "We know that the top annual income brackets amount to far more than LE25,000 for an entire family, but because of taxes, people conceal such information to us," an official at the CAPMAS information centre told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

There are no statistics available on the number of millionaires in Egypt. In a recent lecture, however, eminent journalist and writer Mohamed Hassanein Heikal placed the number of Egyptian millionaires — "in dollars, not pounds" — at a staggering 30,000.

But proponents of the new trend argue that lavish wedding celebrations and parties should not be viewed as a simple ride on the bravado bandwagon: they also represent a thriving business that provides jobs for hundreds of people. Although it is flourishing steadily, this industry is only two years old.

According to Sherif El-Boulaqi, the Semiramis banquet manager, the "new weddings" provide 40 per cent of the hotel's income, second only to tourism. "Parallel to the rapid developments in wedding celebrations, our hotel had to upgrade its services to absorb the large number of guests. Sometimes 1,000 people are invited," he told the *Weekly*. "If there is any upgrading in the level of entertainment, it is because Egypt is an open market now, and everything is available, so people want the best, and we offer it to them."

Fabric merchants, silversmiths, craftsmen, florists, glass factories, interior designers, caterers, and "wedding cake designers" represent only a fragment of the armies involved in producing a "prestigious" celebration today. While distinguished weddings in the past decade meant five-star hotels and the most popular singers and belly dancers, those setting and following the new trend are turning traditional weddings into spectacular celebrations worthy of any well-established monarch.

Hardly the modest rulers of petty principalities, today's wealthiest brides and grooms demand that even the most elegant banquet-rooms receive a face-lift. Hundreds of metres of silk or tulle, plain or trimmed with delicate flower garlands, often cover the walls and the ceilings of the banquet rooms. The wall coverings, table cloths, upholstery and satin or chiffon ribbons which serve as napkin rings are all colour-coordinated for a more lavish effect. The more meticulous commission specially designed matching glass chandeliers, together with goblets in the same hues. Silver and silver-plated candlesticks also come in numerous designs, from the English and French classics to *faux* antiques to more modern shapes.

Buffets are also breathtaking. The traditional menu, on which turkey, lamb and giant shrimps featured prominently, has changed with international food fashion. New, more original (and expensive) items, most of which are imported, are now de rigueur. A plethora of hors d'oeuvre awaits the guests, before they turn their attention to caviar, oysters, *pâté de foie gras*, Scottish smoked salmon, *sushi* or *sashimi*. Reconstituted peacocks and kangaroo meat ("a little like venison," says one connoisseur) were recently introduced.

It has also become something of a fashion to import most of the menu from Harrods or other prestigious food stores. Harrods' customer services department, as was to be expected, proved reticent as to the value of the store's annual sales to Egypt and an estimate of transport costs. But the word on the street places the average value of imported food sales to Egypt at around £70,000 — approximately LE350,000 per wedding.

To most Egyptians, million-pound bashes are automatically associated with the name of Mahmoud Sho'eir, better known as Mahmoudaki, the talented wedding organiser who dreams up and orchestrates the vast majority of today's wedding trends, as well as the events themselves. "I've been throwing parties ever since I was 16," he explains. "It's a hobby, an art that I enjoy... If it costs a lot of money, that's because it's worth it — although I don't get paid that much," Mahmoudaki told the *Weekly*.

Sitting in his chic Zamalek apartment, cluttered with tasteful arrangements of 19th century French *objets*, the 41-year-old Mahmoudaki fingered a heavy gold chain, adding: "When I am asked to organise a wedding, I spend a few days thinking hard to come up with an idea... It is not easy work! Sometimes it's suicidal, at other times I work continuously for 24 hours just to make sure the final touches are in place. I want everything to be beautiful, to make the newlyweds happy, and their guests too."

Obviously, Mahmoudaki is catering to clients who can afford to finance his flights of fancy. In other words, there is a demand for the services he renders. Such lavish expenditure, economists suggest, should be linked to the radical economic changes enforced by the government, which is rapidly replacing Egypt's old socialist system with a market-driven capitalist economy.

Conspicuous consumption is everywhere. Rolls Royce and Jaguar cars are now available in at least two show rooms in Cairo. Mercedes and BMW have such high expectations that the Egyptian market will be lucrative that both agreed to open assembly plants in the country a few months ago. Annual sales of new vehicles since 1990 have jumped from 20,000 to 65,000 units.

"Our aspirations and imagination are different from those of the new global-oriented generation, with all its consumerist connotations," explains Noussa, a construction engineer who owns a craft gallery and has worked with Mahmoudaki. Her participation in luxury weddings was limited to two celebrations, one of which was the wedding of the son of a Gulf emir.

Mahmoudaki chose gold and turquoise as the dominant colours with a theme of Arabian horses, the bridegroom's passion. Noussa's role was limited to constructing four two-metre-high horses, frozen in mid-leap. Made of gold leaf and reconstituted marble, they surrounded the enormous wedding cake.

"They did not throw all this away when the wedding was over, as many would like to believe, but simply put them in the garden," Noussa points out. "It is too easy to attack such lavish expense, regardless of whether or not many people, who would otherwise be unemployed, get to work and to earn money," she adds.

To Noussa, the wedding business is still an institution, which works "from hand to mouth". Time is needed, she says, to conceptualise the industry as a whole. "Until then, I will not count heavily on weddings, but I'm keeping an eye on them."



Diana in Wonderland

When Alice, that very English girl, generously endowed with qualities so typical of her class, tumbled into a strange topsy-turvy world, thereafter known as Wonderland, she did so unwittingly, so to speak, though it is said she kept all her wits about her at all times: She was aware of being just an accidental visitor, and was therefore, in the end, confident that she would come out when she chose, unscathed, and be allowed to carry on with her uneventful life. Which is exactly how it happened in actual fact. The year was 1862, when a shy Charles (Lutwidge Dodson) pushed Alice "straight down the rabbit hole to begin with, without the least idea what was to happen afterwards."

Over a century later — the year was 1981 — another Alice, quite similar to the first one and with much the same moral fortitude, was led into Wonderland, albeit in great pomp and circumstance this time, by another Charles (Prince of Wales).

This Alice did not have to worm her way into a hole, in hot pursuit of the White Rabbit, but sat next to him in the royal carriage, while the people of the realm cheered the couple on. As the wedding procession majestically wound its way across London, the first chapter of a modern legend was being written.

This new Alice — let us call her Diana — was also destined to find the new world she had been led into curiouser and curiouser but she, unlike the other one, was not given the chance to bow out at the end of the tale:

"Thus grew the tale of Wonderland
Thus slowly one by one,
Its quaint events were hammered out
And now the tale is done,
And how we steer, a merry crew,
Beneath the setting sun."

She therefore kept going to tea with the Mad Hatter and played croquet with the queen for a long time. Many years went by, but she finally managed to find the door marked Exit. Unlike Alice, who emerged in the setting sun, she did not find her sisters waiting outside in the field and could not, holding their hands, make her way back to a happy home. She did not belong to the quiet English countryside, and so she tumbled right out into the troubled 1990s. These were the years of the media, the years which bored and miserable people, from pole to pole, spent glued to their television sets in search of instant, cheap solace, happy to forget their worries for a few minutes while partaking in the exciting life events of imaginary characters. These were the years when soap operas reigned supreme. From Wonderland, therefore, our new Alice fell right into *Dynasty* and the soap opera viewers stopped and gawked. Real life serials were much more fun and Diana's antics could beat those of the *Bold and the Beautiful* any day, they thought.

But Diana soon realised that she had come to Hollywood-on-Thames by mistake. She had little use for wonderlands, but she refused to be cast in the role of the bold and the beautiful, either. She was in search of True Happiness, she informed the media, under whose microscope she lay; and, with the solid common sense imparted to her by her English upbringing, she thought that the most logical place to search for it was right where she stood, in the real world.

She looked around, and with fortitude worthy of Alice herself, attempted to rescue those drowning in the Pool of Tears; she consoled the Mock-Turtle and partook in the Lobster Quadrille, she befriended the Gryphon and cuddled the desperate baby pig. She had to do this in front of cameras which captured every smile, every pat on the back, every tear of sincere sorrow. Few really knew which world she was now inhabiting. Was she being Alice, or was that a page out of *Falcon Crest*? The public took it all in anyway, and asked for more. As her popularity grew, she became public property. Unlike Alice, who could grow large and small unnoticed, she had to do it in front of millions of viewers and readers. Her feelings were examined, her failings commented upon, her style copied.

One has difficulty imagining Alice's head turned by such notoriety, but Diana, more versed in the ways of the world, made up her mind to accept the rules of the game, using her fame in the service of humanitarian endeavours. She played up to the media in times of need, unaware that, unlike the Cheshire Cat, its smile would not simply fade away. It was far more likely to turn into a bite if she ever got it in her head to dodge it.

And because, as we all know, Diana was not an ordinary person but really belonged to the world of make-believe, it was inevitable that she would eventually meet a prince charming who would awaken her from her long sleep. The saga was coming to end in the best tradition of fairy tales, as the sad princess found bliss and tranquility with a modern Harun El-Rashid, with whom she was preparing to live happily ever after. She had created her own fable, it followed that she would now be allowed to write its happy ending. This was not to be, however, and like the best legends of our childhood, all of which ended sadly, hers will remain forever inscribed in our memories.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fattoush

Ingredients

2 pita bread loaves
Leaves of half a lettuce (finely chopped)
1 medium onion (finely diced)
1/2 tsp. crushed garlic
2 tomatoes (diced)
3 cucumbers (diced)
2 bunches parsley leaves (finely chopped)
1 green bell pepper (diced)
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 tbsp. *sumaa'*
Salt + crushed dried mint
1 tbsp. vinegar
olive or corn oil
corn oil for deep frying

Method

With a pair of kitchen scissors, cut the round edge of the pita loaves to separate the upper from the lower parts. Cut the bread into bite-sized squares. Deep fry them in very hot oil until lightly goldened and crispy. Remove on kitchen paper towels. Allow to cool off. Mix the prepared vegetables with the fried bread. Add all the remaining ingredients except the oil and toss well. Add the oil, stir gently, and sprinkle more *sumaa'* on top. Serve while pita bread is still crispy. Use as a salad with any menu.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Double glazing

Andrew Steele ventures into the realm of the shiny sauce

There is a distinct difference between a good glaze and a shiny sauce. The former has a certain culinary aesthetic with which the latter can simply not compete. To be blunt, a glaze makes a dish look appetizing, but when taken to the extremes of the truly shiny sauce, one can feel that one is eating one's jewellery. Such are the shiny, happy sauces of Peking.

As we passed through the portals of the Heliopolis branch of this ever-expanding oriental caterer, the distinctly un-Chinese strains of Bob Marley and his ubiquitous Wailers could be heard wowoing the assembled masses in their pursuit of eastern delights. A booking may well have been in order, this being a Friday evening, and indeed the little room was a mite crowded. We were seated within ten minutes, however, on heavy wooden chairs with backs slatted to resemble Mandarin pictograms. The comfortingly familiar collection of Chinese puff-lanterns cast a reddish glow on the diners; the fans and prints confirmed the theme, the only aberration being the red ruched pelmets, presiding over twee little lead-light windows.

The service was nothing but impeccable. There was never a shortage of waiting staff, nattily adorned in gleaming white shirts, emblazoned with a finger-paint motif. There were, of course, fiercely starched bow ties to match.

Beers and menus were proffered with admirable speed, the former coming dressed in navy blue pinafore dresses with a red trim, just managing to cross the line between kitsch and tack. The latter was more impressive: 121 items encompassing soups, salads, son tons and the like, chicken, seafood, beef, vegetables and duck. After extensive deliberation, starters were selected. The won tons were crisp, meaty and moist, rather good, in fact, and, with a portion totalling fifteen scrumptious little parcels, corking good value. The spring rolls numbered five and were average; the Shantung Salad was nothing more than slightly insipid tempura. The Ling Salad, however, was a dish of delights. Seared, marinated chicken strips, with lots of sweet red pepper, bands of fired filo pastry and a lemon dressing. Heartily recommended. The main course had its ponts, both high and low, the nadirs being those lashed with the aforementioned shiny sauce, which was bland and anonymous and clung to the palate. The Go-Bo shrimps were rather low on Go, not to mention Bo, and were more than a trifle watery. The Gombi Chicken was equally bland, and I'm afraid the Beef BBQ was just a bit too shiny for its own good. The main course's saving grace was the sublime sliced spiced duck, which had a mighty savoury sauce with not a hint of polish. The whole was accompanied by vegetable fried rice and noodles.

Order an Irish coffee. It's actually revolting and tastes like a caramelised toffee milk shake, but the spectacle is quite unique. For those who have not yet experienced it, I feel loath to free the proverbial cat from its bag, but needless to say, it justifies a visit in itself. Be warned that birdsong and flame play major roles.

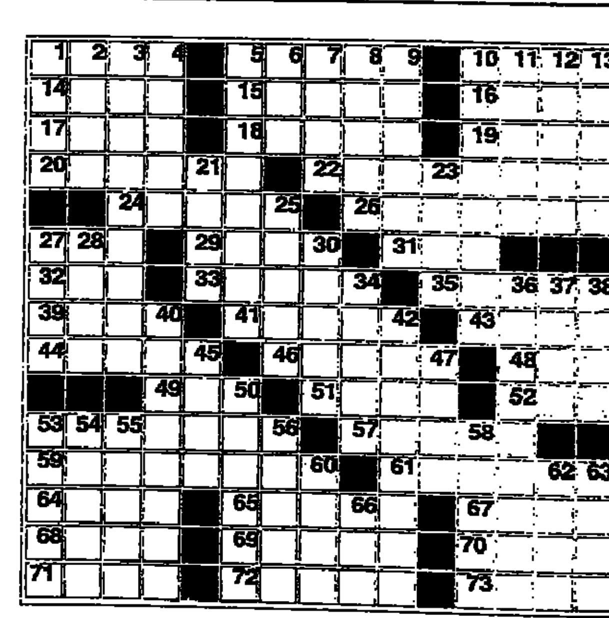
An average venue in all, but a pleasant evening's diversion. Prices, with ample quantities of fluids to imbibe, came to around LE60 per head, and you could do your hair in those sauces.

Peking, 115 Osman Ibn Affan Street, Heliopolis
Tel: 418 5612

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



Across

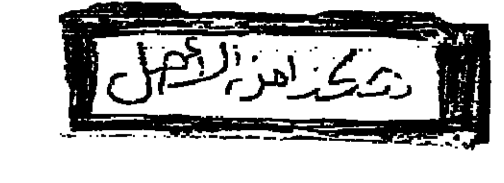
1. Shed tears (4)
5. Adjudge; prize (5)
10. Scrutinise (4)
14. Drunk, Fr. (4)
15. Rock bottom (5)
16. Mixture (4)
17. Spanish-American day labourer (4)
18. Barter (5)
19. Plateau (4)
20. Prepare for algebraic/computer handling (6)
22. Minced rounded viand (8)
24. Pass into law (5)
26. More adroit or clever (7)
27. Step (3)
29. Maize protein (4)
31. Joan of Arc (3)
32. Moke (3)
33. Mr. Poe (5)
35. Wear down (5)
39. Brawl (4)
41. Weird (5)
43. A vegetable (4)
44. An elevated semi-desert plateau in South Africa (5)
46. Fit for her majesty (5)
48. Poetic for "ever" (3)
49. Thick woolen coverlet (3)
51. Moderate, hyph. wds. (7)
52. Hankering (3)
53. Easy running pace, hyph. wds. (7)
57. Unbending; spartan (5)
59. Reference (8)
61. Knotted (6)
64. A fleshy fruit (4)
65. A cut of meat, hyph. wds. (5)
67. Slangy agreement (4)
68. Assistant (4)
69. Tantrums; frenzies (5)
70. ...majesty (4)
71. Weather directions (4)
72. Existences (5)
73. Says; jumbled (4)

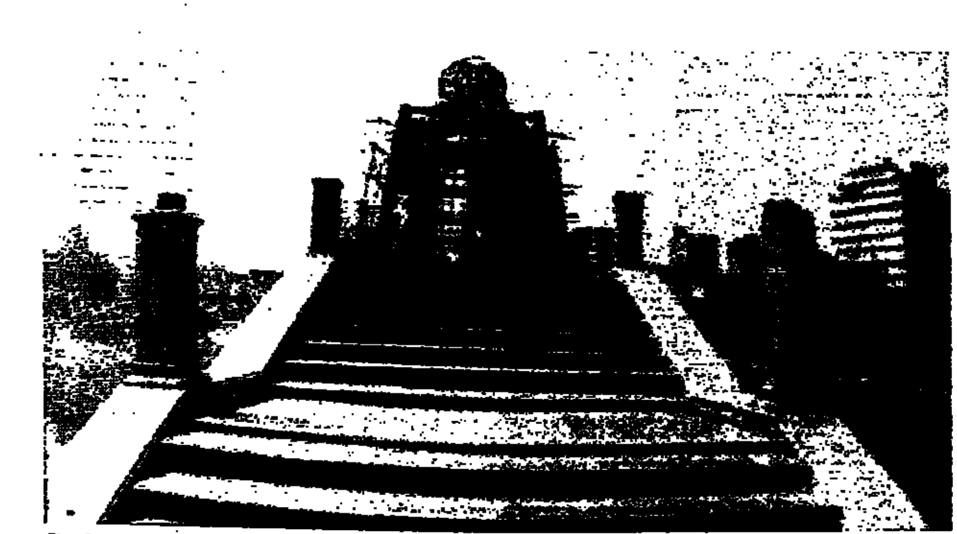
DOWN

1. Mop; eradicate (4)
2. Smooth; notwithstanding (4)
3. Converter; organiser (9)
4. Mortise projection (5)
5. Herald; go in advance of (8)
6. Fighting (3)
7. First man (4)
8. Goes by bus (5)
9. Builds castles in the air (6)
10. Mexican hat (8)
11. A wedge (5)
12. Passageway (5)
13. Loran, jumbled (5)
21. Boggle; bewilder (4)
23. Famous London gallery (4)
25. Ferocious cat (5)
27. Woodland; garage for cars (4)
28. A continent (4)
30. The nostrils (5)
34. Strictness (5)
36. Reduplication of slang agreement (9)
37. Submit to one's destiny, Sc. (4)
38. Merit (4)
40. Martyrs; puts someone through he wringer (8)
42. Facility (8)
45. Personal pronoun (4)
47. Emblem (4)
50. Swelling of the thyroid (6)
53. Asian country (5)
54. An acid glycerin ester (5)
55. Open space in wood (5)
56. South American native race (5)
58. Fantasies (5)
60. Egg-flips (4)
62. Impudence (4)
63. Ogles (4)
66. Born (3)

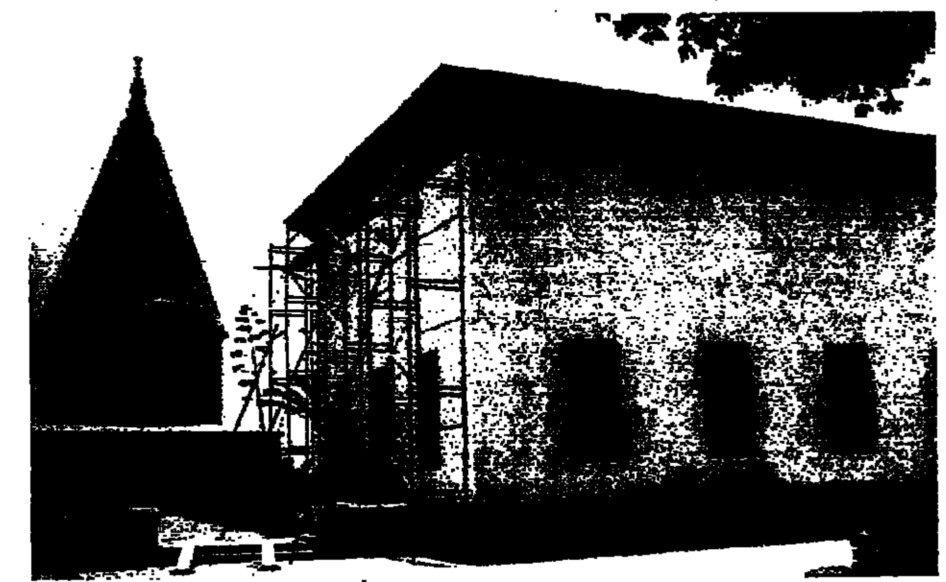
SPUR ERECT DASH
TARA NICER ERIE
AVID TAUPE FILE
RECIPE SAVEALL
CORD SIN
NOWADAYS UNDONE
ARIL INURE HEP
WAD ANODE OWE
ATE EGGED ANTE
BERATE KEENNESS
VON ROOD
LICENCE CRAVAT
ANON ISTLE NARY
STAG EATEN TIER
HOLE SUITE ELSE

Last week's solution





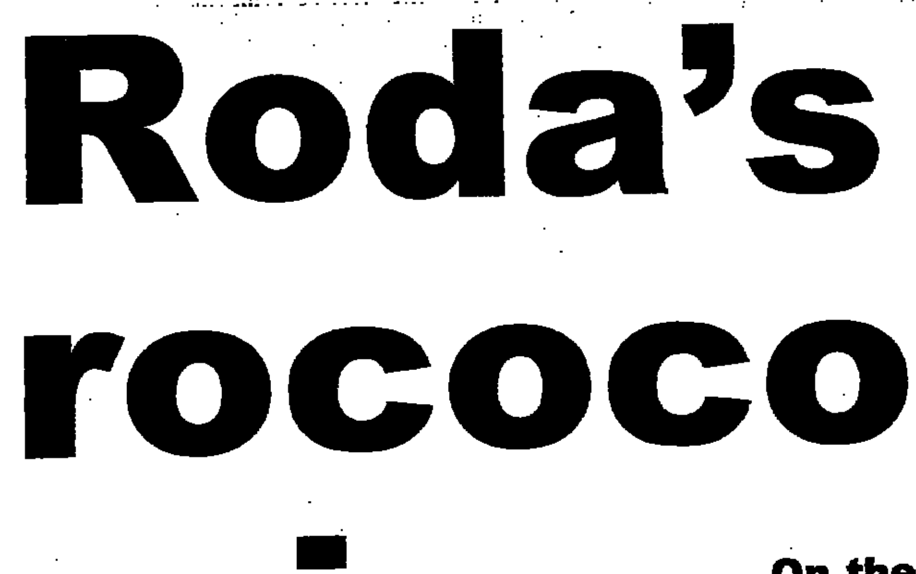
Could it be mistaken for the Ponte Vecchio? photo: Antoune Albert



Redoing the woodwork



Once a fortress, it was also home to turtle-doves



Roda's rococo ruins



Plastic surgery for a palace which, among other distinguished guests, briefly housed the Arab League photo: Randa Shaath

On the southern tip of Roda, the remains of a once lavish abode stand not far from the Nilometre. Fayza Hassan **fears for the future of the Manasterli Palace**

Unlike his powerful ancestor, one of Salaheddin's successors at least was not partial to mountain air. El-Malek El-Saleh Negmeddin Ayyoub deserted the Muqqattam and its Citadel, preferring to dwell close to Fustat, on an island in the Nile, where he ordered a fortified palace to be built.

According to El-Maqrizi, the palaces and dwellings on the island had to be razed to make room for the construction of the new royal residence, which rose magnificently from amidst lush gardens. The palace was built on the site of the Nilometre Palace. When the buildings were finally ready, Negmeddin moved with his entourage, his harem and his be- Mamelukes to live on the island, coming the first of the Bahari (from *bahr*, or sea) Mamelukes. It is said that Selim I stayed in this palace when he came to Egypt in 1517 and it is there, according to a number of historians, that an attempt on his life was made by Mameluke emirs who wanted to vindicate the hanging of Touman Bay, the last of the Mameluke sultans.

At the time when *La Description de l'Egypte* was compiled, only the main *qa'a* (reception room) and a monu- mental gothic wooden door, carved by Crusaders taken as prisoners of war, re- mained of Negmeddin's palace. This *qa'a* is described by many historians and researchers as a rare prototype of Mameluke architecture.

On part of the ruins of Negmeddin's palace, of which only the *qa'a* remained, another palace was built during the reign of Mohamed Ali, completed during the reign of Abbas and owned by Hassan El-Manasterli, who was ap- pointed Katkhuda (lieutenant) in 1850 and placed in charge of the Maglis Al-Ahkam (council of justice). In 1854, he was replaced by Ismail Pasha. He was demoted by Said Pasha on the grounds that he was not fulfilling his duties as expected, having exhibited many of the failings of a typical bureaucrat.

Informing him of his disgrace, Said wrote to him: "While I had hoped — and was expecting — that you would serve me well, it has come to my attention that you are neglecting your duties, arriving at your place of work between 4.00 and 5.00 o'clock and leaving no later that 9.00 or 10.00. You spend your time reading for your own pleasure and performing your prayers in the middle of the day. Such behaviour has produced innumerable delays in your attendance to my subjects' problems and has resulted in the piling up of more than 150 files containing cases up for litigation to which you have not directed your attention until now.

"As I have told you time and again, both verbally and in writing, nothing is more important to me than the affairs of my subjects. From your attitude, I gather that your personal endeavours are preventing you from bringing swift solutions to my subjects' problems, an enterprise that I personally consider more worthwhile than your devotions. Since I realise now that you are incapable of giving priority to the affairs of the state, and leave the problems of my subjects unresolved instead of speeding up the process of justice, I suggest that you take more space and time for the practice of your own interests, withdrawing from public service and remaining in the comfort of your home."

El-Manasterli became governor of Cairo in 1854 but remained in this post for only a year. He then held a couple of minor administrative offices from 1857 to 1859, whereupon he ceased any public activity. He died in 1859, and was buried in a small mosque next to his palace, in which he had prepared a tomb for himself and another for Sheikh Abdel-Rahman Abu 'Ouf, a Sufi sheikh, who, it is said, had visited him in his dreams and ordered him to build him a tomb.

Only the reception area (*salamlek*) of the Manasterli Palace remains to this day, surrounded by an open area laid with marble floors and topped by a carved and painted wooden ceiling. A splendid, similarly carved and painted, wooden corniche extends beyond the open area and runs around the bottom of the roof. When the palace was built, the Mosque of the Nilometre was pulled down to allow for the palace servants' quarters to be erected in its place.

Ali Mubarak described the palace in his *Khitat* as having begun to fall into disrepair soon after El-Manasterli's death. He predicted its disappearance in the near future. "All that is left," he writes, "is the *salamlek*, consisting of a single storey made of stone covered with stucco. The ceilings are of wood and the floors and walls are decorated with baroque and rococo motifs. The rest of the palace has been pulled down to make room for a water station. Of the beautiful surrounding gardens, nothing remains. Only a fountain has been salvaged, which now graces the gardens of the Islamic Museum in Cairo.

"Access from the main western entrance reveals a large hall leading to a *qa'a* [front reception room] with three *iwans* [open reception rooms] surrounding a smaller square *qa'a*, in the middle of which stands an oval fountain. The ceiling of this *qa'a* is slightly domed, while the *iwans* are crowned with half-domes of carved wood. Doors from the main *qa'a* open onto several rooms and a bathroom. The verandah-like open space which extends from the west to the southern side of the palace, and opens directly onto the Nile, features supporting wooden columns and a painted wooden ceiling."

For a time, this open area was used for monthly concerts during the summer months, mainly by the Arabic Music Troupe, but the place became unavailable to the troupe two years ago, says Abdel-Aziz Qanani, who used to attend every concert. There were unconfirmed rumours of a complete overhaul of the Manasterli Palace — or what remains of it — as well as its grounds, including the makeshift wooden bridge which had been erected in 1987 to allow spectators to cross from the Maadi Corniche to the southern tip of the island, to attend performances of the play *Salome* by Mohamed Salmawy. Today, the bridge is already in poor condition, and resembles a hastily erected scaffolding somewhat past its prime. According to a source close to the Ministry of Culture who prefers to remain anonymous, the bridge was to be replaced by a copy of Florence's Ponte Vecchio, complete with craft and souvenir shops and a number of fashionable cafés and restaurants.

A feasibility study for the project was initiated but nothing seems to have come of it.

Right now, the palace is undergoing some restoration work under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture. The reconstruction has been entrusted to independent contractors, while the interior walls are being redecorated by young students of the Faculty of Fine Arts. Recently, large marble slabs were being laid in one of the main reception rooms, while the elaborate designs which once adorned the walls and ceilings of the palace were being painted over in enthusiastic pastels, which made up in brightness what they lacked in accuracy. It appears that, once the restoration work is completed, the palace will become a museum for the jewels belonging to famous singer Umm Kulthoum, whose private villa in Zamalek was pulled down shortly after her death, and replaced by an unsightly tower.

Sources:

J-C Garcin, B Maury, J Revault, M Zakariya: *Palais et Maisons du Caire I* (CNRS, 1982)

Doris Behrens Abouseif: *Islamic Architecture in Cairo* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1989

Mohamed Hossameddin Ismail: *Al-Qahira, 1805-1879* (Al-Afaq Al-Arabiya, 1997)



Garden of delights

RODA Island (From *rawda*, meaning garden) is the only one in the Nile which has remained unchanged for centuries. By Byzantine times, a fortress had been built on its shores. During the overflowing of the Nile, it was connected to the mainland by a bridge resting on boats. Shortly after the Arab conquest the Nilometre on its southern tip was rebuilt. Apart from Negmeddin's fortress and palace, which were eventually abandoned while the rulers went back to the Citadel on the mountain, the island was covered with vegetation and sometimes beautiful gardens. Many travellers coming to Egypt visited the island and wrote about its gardens.

Claude Etienne Savary, born in 1750 in Vitré, Brittany, waxed lyrical in *Les Lettres sur L'Egypte* (1785-1786) about his frequent visits to "the beautiful gardens of Roda," which he preferred to "the mosques in ruin and the dilapidated palaces of the Citadel." Walking under the sycamores, the tamarind and orange trees, he inspired many travellers who retraced his footsteps to the island in search of the magic: "Sometimes, a few rays escaping from the sun ploughed a luminous furrow through the shadows, covering part of the leaves with gold. Emanations from the flowers and plants scented the air. A multitude of turtle-doves flew from one tree to the other, undisturbed by my presence."

In 1806 Chateaubriand, awaiting an audience with Mohamed Ali, asked to be taken to Roda: "We were much closer to the Pyramids... At this distance they seemed of an immeasurable height... through the greenery and rice fields, the course of the the river, the tops of the palm trees and sycamores... the light of the sun tinted the arid chain of the Muqattam, the Libyan sands, Saqqara and the plain of the tombs on the horizon, with an admirable sweetness. A cool wind chased small white clouds towards Nubia and raised ripples on the vast sheet of water of the Nile floods. Egypt appeared to me as the most beautiful country in the world."

Visiting Egypt in the 1840s, Gerard de Nerval appears more critical, however: "Do not visit the island of Roda," he warned; it had been "transformed by Ibrahim into an English garden with artificial rivers, Chinese lawns and bridges."

Source:

Jean-Marie Carré, *Voyageurs et Ecrivains Français en Egypte*, 2 vols., IFAO, Cairo (2nd edition)

Sprucing up the Egyptian Museum

Showcasing its most cherished pieces like the fabled treasures of Tutankhamun's tomb and new aquisitions are part of the current scheme. **Nevine El-Aref** reports

"Entrances and exits will be controlled, security and lighting will be improved and, for the first time, there will be a special hall in the museum for the presentation of illustrated lectures and the screening of documentary films," said Mohamed Saleh, general director of the museum. Saleh went on to explain that special attention will be given to the new display of Tutankhamun's treasures. "All the halls are being attended to," he said.

The project started at the beginning of the summer when two electronic security gates were installed at the museum's entrances, for visitors and the administration. Moreover, the visitors' entrance and exit passages are now separated by thick unbreakable glass. "In addition, two electronic ticket machines, like the ones in the underground stations, have been installed at the museum's entrance and exit points. These are equipped to count, minute by minute, the number of visitors moving in and out of the museum," Saleh explained, adding that this will allow the security services to accurately control the number of visitors in the museum at all times "and thus prevent any potential thief from spending the night in the museum and taking priceless items."

Also, the space between the sarcophagi and their lids is being covered with unbreakable glass, "to prevent a thief from jumping in and hiding until closing time when he could spend the night choosing whatever he wants."

The arrangements being made for Tutankhamun's halls include not only a completely new layout for the treasures, but the installation of new lighting and showcases equipped with the latest technology for safeguarding the museum's unique collection. New identification cards for each object on display will be in different languages and brochures, calendars and postcards of Tutankhamun's collection will be distributed among the visitors. The walls will also be cleaned and damaged tiles replaced.

The Egyptian Museum has undergone various renovations and improvements since 1995, but this latest endeavour is the most far-reaching to date. The upgrading of the security system is financed by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) while the rest of the project is being financed by donations from the American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE); the Fulbright Commission; the Dutch Association for International Cooperation; Ahmed Ezz, head of the Tenth of Ramadan Investors Association; as well as the International Arab Corporation. The SCA is providing the materials needed for all the renovations: wood, glass, textiles and air-conditioning units. The new showcases and new furniture will be manufactured in the workshops of the SCA.

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Object of the month:

Royal children

A NEWLY discovered statue of a woman holding four royal children has gone on special display at the Egyptian Museum this month, reports Nevine El-Aref.

This new exhibit is a continuation of the Egyptian Museum's programme of special displays on the theme of motherhood, launched early this summer. The limestone statue shows a seated nurse holding three royal infants in her arms with a fourth one lying in her lap. Two baboons, one holding a mirror and the other a container for *kohl*, appear on the sides of the seat.

The statue is inlaid with coloured glass and semi-precious stones and has been described by Mohamed Saleh, general director of the museum, as "unique".

The statue was discovered early this year by a man digging in the basement of his house near the Pepi I Temple in Tel Basta in Zagazig. Archaeologists, however, suspect that the statue had been moved there in modern times, probably in the course of a smuggling attempt.

The statue, which underwent restorative work before its display, shows design features common to both the Old and New kingdoms, according to Ali Hassan, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities.

From Nineveh to New York

The UN imposed sanctions on Iraq have proved destructive on many levels including the country's antiquities as recently disclosed by an American archaeolgist who spoke to **Omayma Abdel-Latif**

Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire, has been exposed to massive looting of antiquities according to an American archaeologist, Professor John Malcolm Russel, a member of a California team who have been excavating in Nineveh since 1990. He claims the international mafia took advantage of the breakdown of authority in the Iraqi city to loot and smuggle out of the country invaluable pieces of antiquities from the palace of Sennacherib, king of Assyrians, who captured Jerusalem in 701BC. An account of the looting has been disclosed by Russel in his book entitled *From Nineveh to New York* due on the market this month. Russel told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that sculptured slabs of the palace have been sold in international antiquities markets.

"Most of these reliefs have not been published. Some show unusual subjects and provide valuable information on visual narrative composition in Assyrian palace decoration," said Russel.

Only two years ago, in 1995, did the team realise the necessity to document the remains of Nineveh after Russel was shown a fragment of an Assyrian relief for sale on the antiquities market.

The ruins of Nineveh were first explored back in 1847 when a young British adventurer Austen Henry Layard explored the ruins of the ancient city and rediscovered the lost palace of Sennacherib. The king had crossed the Tigris River from modern Mosul in northern Iraq to capture Jerusalem. Inscribed in cuneiform on the colossal sculptures in the doorway of its throne room was the king's own account of his siege of Jerusalem. The palace is one of only two preserved Assyrian palaces in the world. The other is the palace of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud.

"There is no doubt that the fragment came from the same slab, which was intact in the Nineveh Site Museum in 1990 but which has evidently been broken up by looters."

Soon thereafter, Russel was shown two photographs of two more fragments that had been in storage in Nineveh in 1990, but which are now also on the art market. One came from Hall XLIX of Sennacherib's palace and shows labourers towing a load toward the right. "The other," says Russel, "is more unusual. It shows two dead sheep and a dead man floating in water.

"I know of no occurrence of domestic livestock shown this way, other than a fragment that shows a dead buffalo in the water, which was found by George Smith during his excavations at the west end of the palace in 1874."

It has proved impossible to determine who was offering these three fragments for sale, or where they were being kept so Russel decided to take things in hand. He published a report alerting prospective buyers that the sculptures had been stolen from the site museum at Nineveh. These fragments, he warned, would be poor investments.

Since Iraqi law prohibits the export of antiquities from Iraq without an official permit, and since these sculptures have no such permits, Iraq would have clear legal grounds to reclaim them from any purchaser. Furthermore possession of such antiquities is a violation of the United Nation sanctions against Iraq, which means that they could be confiscated by customs authorities.

The most spectacular of these antiquities was a group of 28 Assyrian sculptures, including two human-headed lions and bull colossi.

Assyria is in fashion again, and its sculptures are bringing unprecedented prices Russel claims in his book. In 1992, while carrying out research for the book, he observed an original sculpture still in place on the "Nineveh Porch" at Canford, now Canford School. In 1994 this sculpture was auctioned by the school a for $12 million, by far the highest price ever paid for an antiquity.

Under the United Nations sanctions against Iraq, resources have been diverted from non-essential areas such as the preservation of antiquities and heritage to cover basic necessities. For antiquities and heritage, the combination of local desperation and international demand is a recipe for disaster. Some Iraqis with nothing left to sell have evidently turned to selling off bits of Iraq's rich heritage. These relatively small fragments would be easy to conceal and smuggle out of the country, most likely through the Kurdish territory only a few miles to the north of Mosul, but also possibly through Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, or Saudi Arabia. They then might be hidden until a buyer could be located.

In November 1996, Russel was contacted by a lawyer acting on behalf of a prospective buyer who had photographs of ten Assyrian sculptures that were said to be on the market. The lawyer wanted to know if they were being sold legitimately. They were not. Nine of the ten new pieces are fragments of wall relief from the Sennacherib Palace Site Museum. All nine fragments had been broken from large wall slabs that were intact in the museum in 1990.

"They had not merely been broken from the edges of a few slabs. Each fragment came from a different slab, and most had been broken from the middle of a slab, suggesting that the looters extracted the best-preserved bits, destroying the remainder in the process.

"Formerly intact, and partially intact, slabs are now apparently piles of rubble. The tenth fragment is evidently from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad, which was being stored at Nineveh in 1990."

"Strangely enough," Russel explained, "the large wall slabs have been converted into small marketable fragments. Each piece is a portion of a large slab. In cases where the surrounding surface was not well preserved, these parts were broken away to create a well-preserved fragment.

"A similar case is a fragment that shows small figures behind a city wall. On the original slab, which was preserved to its full height, there were large figures of soldiers directly above the city. These were completely broken away, evidently so that their large scale would not distract from the interest of the miniature scene below," added Russel.

But why is this happening now? Russel said, "The United Nations sanctions against Iraq have finally destroyed Sennacherib's palace, finishing the work begun by the ancient Medes and Babylonians who sacked Nineveh in 612BC. To be sure, market and political forces are also at work here, but the fact remains that without the sanctions, this destruction would not have happened."

Today the Sennacherib Palace Site Museum at Nineveh represents a world heritage disaster of the first magnitude. Immediate emergency conservation measures are required to preserve what remains of its sculptures. One might think that international support for such a crucial undertaking could be readily obtained, but the obstacles appear insurmountable. The same United Nations sanctions that have contributed to the destruction of the palace museum also prohibit any form of outside cultural assistance to Iraq. The United Nations sanctions committee has repeatedly refused to grant permission for international teams to assess actual and potential damage to the cultural heritage of Iraq in the wake of the Gulf War. There is an urgent need for documentation and conservation of Iraqi monuments considering the wartime damage and the postwar looting.

Russel believes that the hostility towards Iraq's heritage reflects a widespread misunderstanding in the West, "which fails to make the connection between modern Iraq and ancient Mesopotamia, the 'Cradle of Civilisation.' This heritage disaster also highlights the role of the West as a myopic consumer of heritage, a vanishing irreplaceable shared resource," he added.

On site

Solar lighting by night

TOURISTS will soon be able to admire the monuments of Luxor and Aswan by night. Solar lighting systems are being installed at the foot of Aswan's Nilometer on Elephantine Island, the Theban hills and the Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

The systems are similar to the one used by the Louvre. The project, costing half a million French francs, is funded by a grant from the French Government.

Kom Ombo temple renovated

THE GRAECO-Roman temple at Kom Ombo is undergoing restoration and its surroundings are receiving the attentions of landscape specialists. Focus is on the inner chambers of the temple dedicated to the gods Horus and Sobek.

The temple was constructed of rock brought from the ancient mines of Silsila, an area exploited by the pharaohs to built many of their monuments.

Never too late for Horus

THE ANCIENT deity would be pleased with the Ministry of Culture, which has allocated $1.5 million to restore his magnificent temple at Edfu.

The work will be carried out in two phases, the first focusing on the main temple and subsidiary constructions. The existing entrance to the site will be shifted a few metres away from the temple itself and provided with a ticket kiosk. The wall reliefs and inscriptions will undergo restoration work and a new lighting system will be installed.

The second phase of the project aims to prevent encroachment on the temple's eastern side by unauthorised peddlers.

Champollion in the lecture hall

IT IS 175 years since the French scholar Champollion first stared at a rock and made it speak.

This month, the Luxor Governorate is marking the occasion with a number of lectures and exhibitions on the life and work of the man who made the decisive breakthrough in understanding the previously indecipherable Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Reported by ***Nevine El-Aref***

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.
Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company
Buses travel to North/South Sinai
Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qulali (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagnid Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 482-4753.

Cairo-Ismailia
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qulali, then Almaza and Tagnid Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus Company

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safaga
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.
Cairo-Quseir
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan
Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 4.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners, LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 9.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51, second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turbini" trains
VIP train: Semmer 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22, second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE351 for Egyptians, LE1143 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE259 for Egyptians, LE829 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE898 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE387 for Egyptians, LE945 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Egyptian tourism on the Internet

Here are some useful addresses on the Internet, including tourism magazines, archaeology and travel agency programmes:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/links.htm is an address through which you can access other useful tourism addresses on the Internet. Here they are:

http://www.idsc.gov.eg/tourism is the address of Egypt's Tourism Net which provides directories of Egypt's hotels, restaurants, cruise lines, travel agents, transportation companies and tourist attractions. Egypt's tourism net is a part of many home pages (culture, health, environment, etc) created by the IDSC as a part of the nation's Information Highway.

http://163.121.10.41/tourism is the key to Egypt Has It All, where Egypt's tourist sites, such as the Red Sea, Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, the Sinai, Alexandria, oases and ETA offices abroad are described. The magazine also contains colour photographs of Egypt.

http://www.memphis.edu/egypt/egypt.htm is the address of the University of Memphis, and describes their projects in Egypt.

http://www-ceg.ceg.uiuc.edu/~hagg ag/travel.html is the address of Egypt's Tours and Travel, which organises packages for people who want to take quality tours. It is an Egyptian tour operator, which specialises in tours within Egypt, the Holy Land and the Middle East.

http://www.geocities.com/The Tropics/7210 is the address of The Curse of the Pharaohs. It includes photographs of ancient tombs and temples.

http://www.ezy.be/horses is the address of The Arabian Horse Worldwide Guide. This guide aims to promote the world's most beautiful and versatile horse — the Arabian.
http://intercoz.com/egypt is a 2,000-page magazine, published by the Ministry of Tourism, where all Egyptian tourist sites are listed and described.
http://www.datum.com.eg/~city is the address of the magazine *Cairo Scene*, Cairo's first on-line art and entertainment guide. It is the most up-to-date source on where to go and what to do in Cairo. It has also sections for books and the latest CDs besides proposed places to visit like Wadi Rayan.
http://watt.seas.virginia.edu/~aoa5v is the site of Exodus Egypt, a daily site covering home news including political, social and cultural events.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels and travel agencies are still offering special prices which are valid for Egyptians and foreign residents

Travel agencies

New City Travel is offering trips to Paris, London, Damascus and Beirut. Trips to Paris go for LE1890 for 8 days including accommodation on breakfast basis. Another 15-day trip combines Paris and London for LE3990 including accommodation in three-star hotels including open buffet breakfast. A week trip to Damascus and Beirut costs LE2090. The price includes accommodation in four-star hotels on breakfast basis.

Hotels

Cairo
Pyramids Park Hotel, an Inter-Continental global partner resort, is offering a single room for LE160 and a double for LE180 including service fees and taxes, 20 per cent discount on all food items, free shuttle bus to city centre and free use of the exercise room. Prices are valid until October.

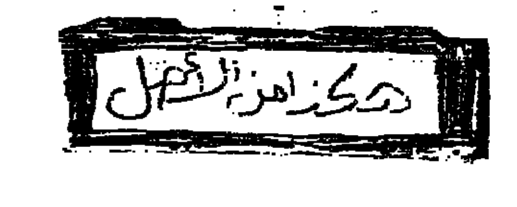
Sonesta Hotel Cairo is offering double rooms for LE220 and singles for LE200 including breakfast and taxes.

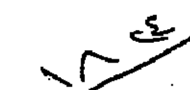
South Sinai
Sharm El-Sheikh
Sonesta Beach Resort Sharm El-Sheikh is offering a rate of LE260 for double rooms and LE190 for single rooms including breakfast, taxes and services.
Coral Bay Resort is offering a rate of LE120 per person for double rooms and is also offering a rate of LE700 for 7 nights including breakfast. Prices are valid until the end of September.

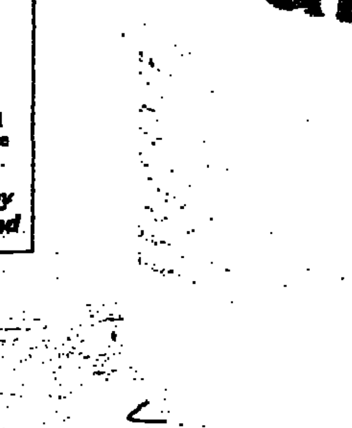
Dahab
Novotel Dahab is offering a rate of LE200 per person for double rooms for three days including breakfast buffet. The offer is valid until September 1997.

Red Sea
Sonesta Beach Resort Hurghada is offering a rate of LE266 for double rooms and LE210 for singles on half-board basis including taxes and service charge.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***









Maybe cheers in Ismailia were not inspiring enough for the Egyptian Juniors who lost 1-2 to Spai n *photo: Medhat Abdel-Meguid*



Defending champions Ghana overcame the Omanian obstacle *photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razik*

The longest match of them all. Germany hardly qualified for the semi-final *photo: Khaled El-Fiqi*

World Cup hopes shattered for Egypt

A 1-2 loss to Spain shattered Egypt's hopes of reaching the semi-finals of the Under-17 World Cup tournament in Ismailia, writes **Inas Mazhar**

Domination does not always lead to victory, as Egypt found out in a 1-2 loss in a quarter-finals match against Spain on Monday, that knocked the team out of the running in the Under-17 World Cup tournament.

While the Egyptian team retained control of the ball for 58 per cent of the game, they were unable to push through a tightly-knit Spanish defence.

European champions Spain started the match with a strong offensive strategy, but it wasn't until the 27th minute that they were able to place their first goal, kindly handed to them on a platter by their star-player, Sergio.

Four minutes later, Egypt's Ahmed Bilal scored an equaliser for his team off a smooth shot by teammate Mohamed Abul-Ela.

Early in the second half, Spain came back with a vengeance, drilling the ball into the net — only to have the goal not counted as a result of an offside. But in the 66th minute, Spain's Camacho compensated, transforming a perfect pass from teammate Corona into the second goal.

Egypt, feeling the pressure, turned up the heat playing a skilled and aggressive game. But a chain-mail defence by the Spanish foiled Egyptian efforts to score another equaliser.

The team played its best match of the tournament, said Egypt's head coach Mohamed Ali after the match.

"We had a number of chances. No one can believe that they didn't put out into goals," he said.

While the coach was supportive, the players were crushed, sitting for nearly 15 minutes on the field crying until they were finally ordered off by Ali.

Spain's coach said he was impressed by the level of play by the Egyptian side, noting that it reflected a tremendous improvement over the team's performance in the three preliminary matches.

But the match, he said, is ancient history. "What we are going to do now is concentrate on the match against Ghana," he said.

First into the semi-finals

After a long war of words between the two coaches, the battle was finally settled by the two teams. **Abeer Anwar** was in Alexandria to see the match

Brazil and Argentina have been arch-rivals for many years, and the competition between them was only made the more intense by their results in Ecuador '95, where Brazil took second place and Argentina third. But if both teams were determined to see the other off, both must also have known there could only be one winner. After a tough and relentless contest, it was the Brazilians who sneaked the victory and secured themselves a place in the semi-finals.

In the final phase of the South American qualifiers Brazil had beaten Argentina 2-1, and the memory still rankled. Before the match, Argentina's coach Jose Peckerman took pleasure in telling reporters, "The Brazilians have only two stars. It's just an ordinary team that's living off its history, but we, we play as one team, as one hand."

The Brazilian coach Carlos Cesar wasn't shy in responding to Peckerman's taunts: "Brazil is a strong team", he told the press, "we're frightened of no one. The result of this match will decide who reaches the finals."

By beating Oman 3-1 in the third round of Group C, Brazil were able to avoid having to face Ghana in the quarter-finals. "Our aim now," said Cesar, "is to reach the semi-finals."

After the war of words came the match. From the very beginning, both teams seemed to be feeling the stress. Even the Polish referee appeared to have been affected by the tension which would later lead to five yellow cards. Alexandria Stadium was packed to overflowing, with thousands of spectators left standing outside the gates, pleading to be let in.

The first half was played at a slow pace, as both teams tried not to give any chances away. Argentina had most of the possession, and used it to set up a defensive siege against which the Brazilian players hurled themselves in vain.

However, cheered on by the local fans, Brazil's hero Fabio Pinto managed to break through after 44 minutes to score the first goal, and celebrations broke out through all the stands.

In the second half, Argentina were forced to abandon their defensive strategy and go on the attack to try and equalise. The result was a much more exciting match than what had gone before, yet again it was Brazil who, with patience and determination, finally reaped the reward. And again it was man of the match Fabio Pinto who found the way to score in the 37th minute, after taking on the defence and goalkeeper single-handed.

This second goal put an end to all Argentina's illusions: even the third place they had managed last time was now beyond their grasp. The coach and players were clearly shocked and unwilling — or unable — to come to terms with their defeat.

After the match, Peckerman could only say: "We played well, we had a good defence, but we were unlucky enough to lose." On the other hand, Carlos Cesar had a lot to be happy about, and it showed. For him, the victory proved that it was all his players who deserved to win, and not just one. "We were in control all the time," said Cesar. "I think that Peckerman's illusions are over now. It'll be at least another two years before they get to prove they can beat Brazil." He also thanked the local fans in Alexandria for giving his team so much support.

Fabio Pinto was obviously delighted to learn that he had been named man of the match for the second time in a row. But he was also quick to praise his team-mates. "This time all the team should take the title, and not just one person," he said. Pinto currently plays for Internazionale in Italy. His contract will be up this year, but he has not yet decided if he'll sign for another season, or whether he wouldn't prefer to return to his native Brazil.

Thus Brazil became the first country to qualify for the semi-final round, where they will meet Germany. The squad seemed genuinely moved to be leaving Alexandria for their next match in Cairo. As one player said, "We'd have liked to stay on here. We really loved the people and the place."

Germany barely in

A tug of war between *Germany* and *Mali* ended with a 4-3 penalty shoot-out victory that propelled Germany into the semi-finals of the U-17 World Cup. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports

The longest match in the U-17 World Championship was also the toughest one. Before some four thousand spectators, Germany and Mali battled it out last Sunday in Cairo Stadium in a match requiring a penalty shoot-out to secure a 4-3 win for Germany. From the start of the match, it was clear that both teams were equally matched in terms of skill and physical fitness. It was this, however, that made the match more monotonous than intense.

Despite a flurry of attacks and counter-attacks, equally strong defence playing on both sides cut short the majority of efforts to score.

Throughout the match, Germany's defence was strong, as usual, while the offence searched for the weak points in Mali's team to score. Mali, however, fielded a relatively unprepared defence, forcing the whole team to defend the net during the German team's blitzkrieg.

The Malians, did manage to learned one thing from Egypt's match against Germany: namely to keep the pressure on throughout the game in order to prevent the Germans from reaching their penalty area.

The strategy paid off — in part. While Germany was not able to score on Mali in the first half of the match, they did manage three attempts on goal to Mali's one.

The second half was no different than the first, except that it was characterised by rough play and Mali had more control over the field.

Both team's strategies, which had paid off during the official 90 minutes of the match, meant that the game had to go into over time as a result of a 0-0 tie.

But the extra time yielded little except for more rough play, forcing the match to go into a penalty shoot-out.

Mali received the first crack at a penalty shot, but Youssef Coulibali failed to score. His three teammates, Abdouleya Camara, Bobacar Guindo and Coulibali Diarra, however, did. For the German team, Silvio Adzic, Sebastian Deisle, Michael Miedl and Jens Truckengrod scored, propelling their team into the semi-finals.

Ghana: team of gold

The top four teams managed to stay ahead of the competition and will meet today in the semi-finals. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** reports on Group D, where Ghana thrashed Oman 4-1 in its quarter-final match in Port Said

"My team is determined to win honourably," said Emanuel Kwasi Afrianie, Ghana's head coach, whose team, the top of Group D, routed Oman 4-1 in Port Said to qualify for the semi-finals. Oman, who had kept Brazil at bay, winning the hearts of the Egyptian crowds, were unable to stave off Ghana's relentless assault and tireless energy.

Ghana started the first half with several attacks on the Omani net and were beginning to dominate the field when a powerful shot by Afraiye Owusu, fumbled by the Omani goalkeeper Badr Goman, was driven home by Oman's defender Goma Nasser in the 24th minute — the tournament's first own goal. "The team was under pressure and were more afraid of Ghana than Brazil," the Omani coach, Mubarak Bin Sultan, said. Despite his promise of an instant bonus of $1000 to the players if they beat Ghana, their rivals, unaided by bonus promises and with less crowd support, didn't give them a chance.

The Ghanans continued to threaten the Omanis whose team resorted to defence until Coffie Michael scored the second goal for Ghana in the 42nd minute. Attram Godwin, Ghana's captain, increased the tension by aiming at the Omani net several times even in the substitute time with powerful if unlucky shots, and was named man of the match. Oman's hope for victory diminished, and as tension mounted they resorted to rough tactics, committing several fouls and being given, like their rivals, three yellow cards.

In the second half, Oman adopted an offensive posture and attacked Ghana's net desperately, being rewarded in the 12th minute when Salah Abdel-Latif took a free kick and scored Oman's only goal.

Owusu scored his second goal in the 34th minute and Quaye Awule scored the fourth goal in the 42nd minute and missed another chance in the following minute, but victory was secure. After each goal, Ghana's players would perform a victory dance following the example of Cameroon's renowned player, Milla, who started the trend after scoring in the 1990 World Cup.

With this victory Ghana will today meet Spain who beat Egypt 2-1 in their quarter-final match in Ismailia.

What did they say?

Win, lose or draw, every coach had something to say

• "Thank God we qualified to the quarter-finals." **Egyptian coach Mohamed Ali,** after Egypt's 1-1 draw with Germany.

• "If we had played like this from the beginning of the tournament, we would have made it to the finals." **Chilean coach Vladimir Bigorra** after Chile's grand 6-2 victory over Thailand.

• "We played the best match of the tournament. We are ready for any team, and the strategy is to win." **Argentina's Jose Peckerman** after Argentina's comfortable 2-0 victory over Bahrain.

• "Argentina deserved to win. My players didn't control the ball despite all their training. I don't know why they played so poorly, but they were tired after the first half." **Bahrain's coach Abdel-Aziz Amin** after Bahrain lost 0-2 to Argentina.

• "We played our best, but the skill levels of both teams were not the same. The Germans were more professional, while we are still amateurish." **Thailand's coach Chanvit Polchevin** after his team's 0-3 loss to Germany.

• "The biggest problem the team faced was the level of humidity and the heat." **Mexican coach Jorge Vantoba,** after his team's 5-0 triumph over New Zealand.

• "We don't have to score seven goals in every match. Each match is different. I am happy with the team's performance," **Brazilian coach Ramos Custodio Carlos Cesar** said after Brazil's 3-0 over USA.

• "I am proud of the victory. Mali is among the best teams in the competition." **Spanish coach Juan Santisteban,** after Spain's 1-0 victory over Mali.

• "We were playing against Brazil, the best team and my players were a little intimidated by their aggressive style of play." **US coach Jay Miller** on his team's 0-3 defeat by Brazil.

• "Our fear was not about their skill but their size, build and aggressiveness," **Oman's coach Mubarak Sultan** said after his team's defeat from Ghana 1-4.

• "The real competition begins now for us... we have a mission that will be realised, reaching the final," said **Ghanaian coach Emmanuel Kwasi Afranie** after his team's victory over Oman 4-1.

• "The team executed a great part of the plan, but they lacked the quick counter attack to score a goal," commented **Germany's coach Bernd Stober** after his team's 4-3 victory over Mali with penalty shots after the extra-time match.

'Amm Ahmed:

For years, his stories have been read by others. Now he speaks for himself



photo: Yves Paris

Trials and tribulations

"God has always taken care of me. He has always seen to it that I want for nothing. *Al-Hamdu Lillah*. Whenever things look down, I talk to God directly. I question Him. 'I am your humble servant', I tell Him. 'Why do you make me suffer?' Soon after, all wrongs are righted and I know that He has heard me. God is merciful.

"Those who pretend to know about religion disapprove of my ways. *You should not talk to God* and annoy him with your problems. You should go to the mosque and pray. Of course I go to the mosque and pray every day, but I feel that God needs to know when I am suffering, so I tell Him, and He watches over me. *Al-Hamdu Lillah*.

"Ibrahim, on Tuesday we are having a little reunion, like in the old days. Just a few brothers. I'll slaughter a calf. There will be plenty for everyone. Bring all your friends. You-know-who — I won't mention his name — has been speaking evil of me behind my back. My loved ones have turned their backs on me. He with the bad mouth used to love my stories. I told him the poems that come into my head. He came back for more. His friends became my friends and we were all like brothers, but when I had told him enough to fill the books he is writing, when he no longer needed the stories of my village, he pushed me away. He though I was going to ask him to pay me for all the words I gave him. What a fool!!

"I miss our evenings. I haven't seen *Hagg* Salah for such a long time! You, Ibrahim, can tell him to come on Tuesday. Tell him that what he has heard is not true. Ah! All these days of sadness after I heard that you-know-who was badmouthing me! Food in my mouth turned to ashes. 'It has a bad smell,' I would tell the *Hagga* when she brought my supper, and all the time I knew that the bad smell came from inside me. The smell of friends turning against friends. I even stopped enjoying my *shishas*. I went to the doctor. 'You need rest and vitamins,' he said. What can vitamins do, I ask you, when one's heart is being torn apart? But no more. I will see my friends, I will explain and it will be like it always was. Tuesday. Bring all your friends, Ibrahim, make sure they all come, *Hagg* Salah and Hemeida, Gaber and the doctor and *Ustaz* Nawwar and also that nice young man who came with you last time to the café. He is a journalist, isn't he? Maybe I'll tell him my stories and maybe he will write them better than you-know-who. He changed a lot of things. He even changed the name of my village. Why, I ask you? And if he did not like my stories, why did he come for more? There are many people who are interested by my life, but not him. He wants to pick and choose and change things as it suits him. He has changed so much that it is not my story at all. Deceit, we live in a world of deceit. I wonder why he changed the name of my village? I come from the Sa'id, Kum Saad El-Gharbi, in the district of Safta near Assiut. He came to Haret El-Agouz, where we are now, and sat on this couch like you, in this large house that I bought with the help of God and in which I have gathered my children and the children of my divorced daughter and God has allowed me to provide for all of them, *Al-Hamdu Lillah*.

"In his book he says that my village is in the Delta. Whatever for? Never mind, I forgive him. One must always forgive, for one's heart to remain pure. Maybe when he became a writer and they printed his books, he thought that he knew better than an ignorant fishmonger like myself. And maybe he thought "*'Amm* Ahmed can't read, he will never know.' But I have many friends who read and they told me. They said, "Allah, *'Amm* Ahmed, do you know that he says in his book that you come from the Delta? I am a Sa'idi with a Sai'di character, different from the people of the Delta, he cannot change that now, can he?

"Do you want to hear *'Amm* Ahmed's real story? I want to tell it in my own words and I don't want anything changed.

"As I said, I was born in this little village near Assiut. My father was a labourer. We were poor but I loved my village and the canal. The richer boys had fishing rods and nets and they used to cast them with big gestures, like this... and bring out nothing. I would crouch on the edge of the canal playing in the water with my bare hands and suddenly there would be fish everywhere begging to be gathered in my *galabiya*. I would run home, water dripping down my legs with the fish jumping against my belly. 'Hide your catch,' my mother would whisper, pulling me quickly into our house. 'They will give us the evil eye.' My mother used to cook some of the fish for us and give the rest to the neighbours. Their sons did not have my luck and we did not have an ice box.

"My father died when I was 14. There were four girls — my sisters — and a nursing baby. When the *rais* who hired labourers came to our house, my mother agreed on a sum of money and told me to go with him. I was the breadwinner now. I went with the other boys that the *rais* had gathered on the Giannaclis plantations to pick grapes. The *rais* paid each boy nine piastres a day which he kept until we could make up the sum he had given to our parents. Once my debt was repaid, like the other boys, I told him to save the money for me because I had nowhere to hide it. We slept in the fields and we only had the clothes on our back.

"I kept adding the daily nine piastres in my head. After a while I had a great deal of nine piastres saved and I felt proud. I would give them all to my mother when I went back to our village. One day we woke up and the *rais* had disappeared, taking our piastres with him. We went to see the *khawaga* who owned the land. He said it was none of his business and to go look for our *rais*... We walked for a long time aimlessly. Finally I asked God why this had happened to me. 'It is unfair,' I told Him. 'I worked very hard and *the money* was *for those orphans at home*.' Soon after a truck driver stopped and agreed to give us a ride. He drove us to Damanhour and we parted company. I decided to go to Cairo where I knew we had relatives in Torah. I climbed on the roof of a train and rode to Cairo. When I arrived in Torah, I could not remember the name of our relatives but they were hiring boys to carry stones from the quarries. They paid me seven piastres a day. Labour was cheap in those days. It was a long time ago. Do you know how old I am, Ibrahim? I was born in 1933, it is written on my card. That makes me what? Well, older than you, anyway! So, as I was saying, seven piastres in those days was the going rate for someone who busted his head carrying stones from dawn to dusk. The *rais* who was hiring me told me one day that I looked clever and would I like to work with explosives? It was dangerous but they would pay me well, ten piastres a day to start with. I went to the mountain and I learned. I earned 12 piastres a day the first month and soon I was making over 50. Now I could save and send my family LE 2.00 a month. I went to the post office every month for that. After a year I had enough to buy myself a smart *galabiya* and shoes with an elastic band. 'Ahmed, it is time to go back to the village,' I told myself.

"You should have seen my mother's tears of joy when she saw me all grown in my new *galabiya* and wearing shoes. All the neighbours came around for the celebrations. I did not want to go back to Cairo. I was grown now and had experience. I worked as a *ghaffir* [caretaker] for Mahmoud Bay Niazi in Maghagha and set myself up as a *rais* and went to work with my men for Qout El-Qouloub El-Demerdashia in Ayat and also for Tawfik Megalli El-Wahsh in Matai, Hamed Guda in Kafr Anwar and Mohamed Pasha Mahmoud who had hundreds of feddans of orchards in Fashn. I was making good money and it was time for me to get married. My mother chose me a bride, a girl from her own family who lived in a village close by.

"My father-in-law's relatives were fishmongers in Cairo. They worked in the quarter of Baghala. We moved to Cairo so that I could work with them. I found a couple of rooms in Istabl Antar and for the next 15 years I went every morning to the fish auction at Ghamra, took my fish to Sayeda Zeinab, washed it, arranged it in a basket and, placing the basket on my head, walked the streets from the Tanneries to the Quarries, then Mar Guirguis, El-Malek El-Saleh and finally Manial. Every day for 15 years.

"Well, it was not written that we would stay together for ever. I had a big fight with my wife's relatives and I asked my wife to choose. She *chose me, of course*, and we went back to my village. For a month, I remained without work, but all the time I was racking my brain. One day, I told God: 'You made me fight with those people, are You going to let us starve? I am Your faithful servant and I go to the mosque for prayers and it is they, not I, who started the quarrel.' There and then an idea came to my mind. With all my savings I bought a television set which was powered with batteries and I rented a small shop that I made into a café. The people of my village had never seen a television. They spent most of their free time at the café and business boomed. But it was written that I had to lead a hard life. No sooner had they built the High Dam, than our village was blessed with electricity and my clients deserted me.

"I went to Assiut and visited the fish market there. I introduced myself as a fishmonger from Cairo. 'Who do you know in Cairo?' asked the head of the fishmongers. I gave him names. He was convinced that I was a real fishmonger and invited me to work with them. I had my place in the market and was happy for eleven years. My children were growing up and life was good. I gave thanks to God every day for my good fortune.

"One day, quite unexpectedly, I received a telegram from my sister who had married and was now living in Cairo. It said: 'Come at once'. Nothing else. What could I do? I went, fearing the worst. My sister and her family were living in Manshiet Nasser and had rented a shop in the market. They had also rented a shop for me, my sister told me. The conditions were favourable and there was plenty of work. I had to leave Assiut at once and join them, because with two shops we would have a great deal of influence. I told her that I was happy in Assiut. I wanted to go back that very day but my sister was alone. When I enquired about my brother-in-law, she did not give me a clear answer. He will be back soon, she kept telling me. When he finally arrived, he had my wife, my children and our furniture with him. What could I do? I stayed.

"Do you remember, Ibrahim, the elections at the time of the Gulf War? During the elections a man came around Manshiet Nasser's fish market and asked us if we wanted cards which would state that we were legal and rightfully exercising our trade. We said yes, of course. 'All you have to do is fill in this paper, name, address, date of birth, and give me two pounds.' We all did and he used these papers to pretend that we had all elected him head of the fishmongers. But the traders at the market refused to be fooled in such a dirty way. They all came out against him. Every one of them came out of his shop shouting "*'Amm* Ahmed is the *rais* of the souq'. I would have none of it of course, but they kept shouting until the officials came and the police. 'They want you for their *rais* of the fishmongers of Manshiet Nasser.' See, it is written here under my name. When we moved to Obour Market, I remained the *rais*. Once they are happy with someone they don't let him go. I make sure that the rules are obeyed, that all the contracts are in order, that there is no cheating or irregular business going on. When there is a fight, I decide who is right and who is wrong. I am always fair. This is why they trust me.

"Now everyone gives me due respect when I sit in the evening at the café. I used to smoke evening *shisha* among my dear friends, while contemplating the splendour of Qait Bay Mosque, and feel that life was good indeed in the most beautiful city in the world. *Al-Hamdu Lillah* a thousand times, I used to think.

"You-know-who had to come and spoil it all, telling people that I had changed since I had become the *rais* of the souq. Do you know how I met him? He used to sit at the cafe with all his papers scribbling in his small notebooks all the time. Well, one day, he came with a friend. Later that day, coming out of the mosque, after evening prayers, I found this thick gold chain with a medallion right under my feet. I took it home and showed it to my wife. 'You have to keep it for three days and if at the end of this period nobody claims it, it is yours,' she said. I put the chain in my pocket and forgot about it. The next day, I was smoking my *shisha* at the café as usual, when you-know-who appeared with his friend. They were asking if something unusual had been found lying on the floor, the previous day. 'Something like this, for instance?' I asked, taking the chain out of my pocket. This is when we became friends and I started telling him the stories of my village. He filled many notebooks with them.

"Now the tobacco of the *shisha* is bitter on my tongue and I look at the Qait Bay minaret and think that maybe I am mistaken and it is not the most beautiful sight in the world... But on Tuesday, my friend, I will be happy again."

Profile by ***Fayza Hassan*** *and* ***Mahmoud El-Wardani***

